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Space Gamer

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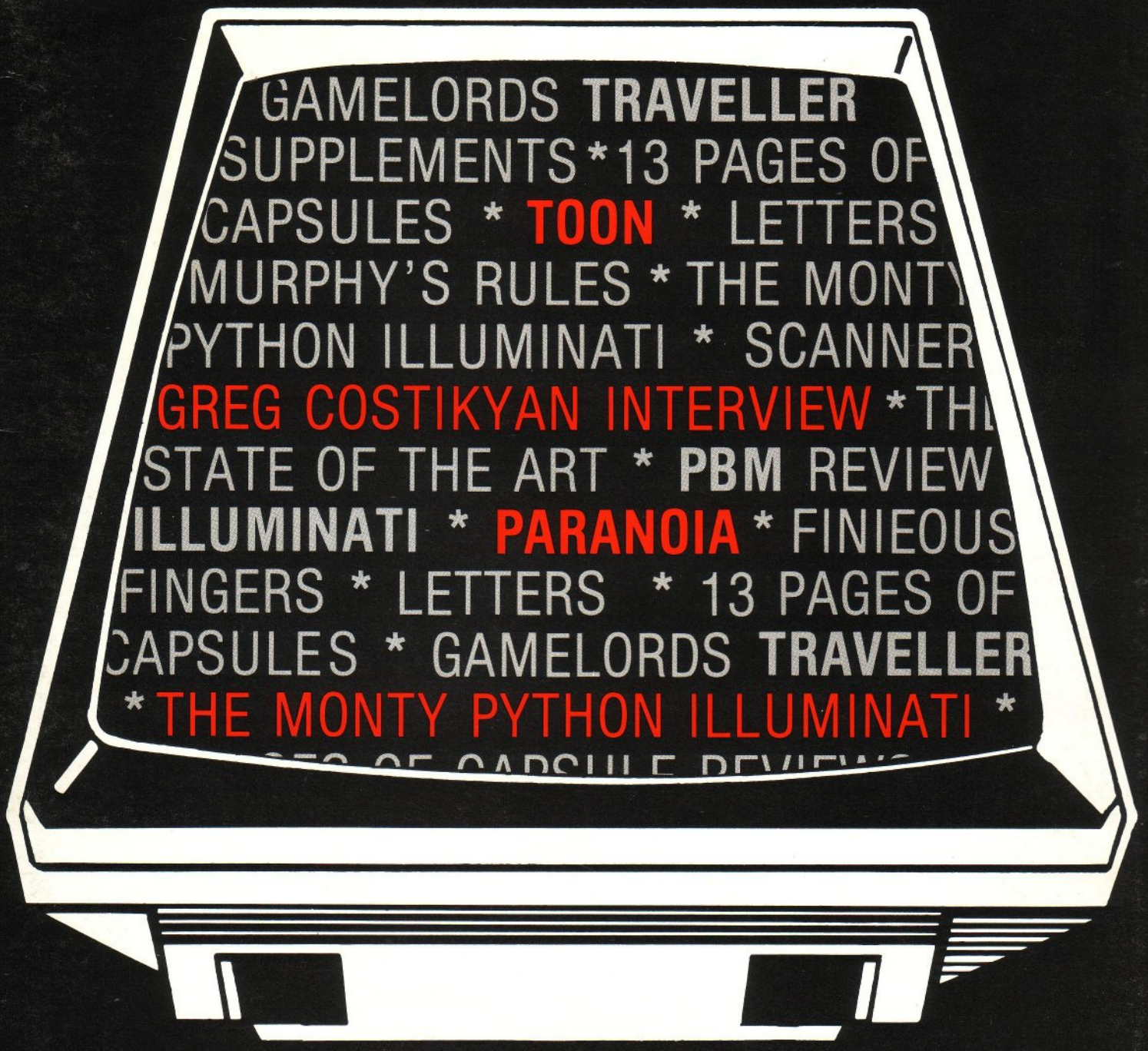
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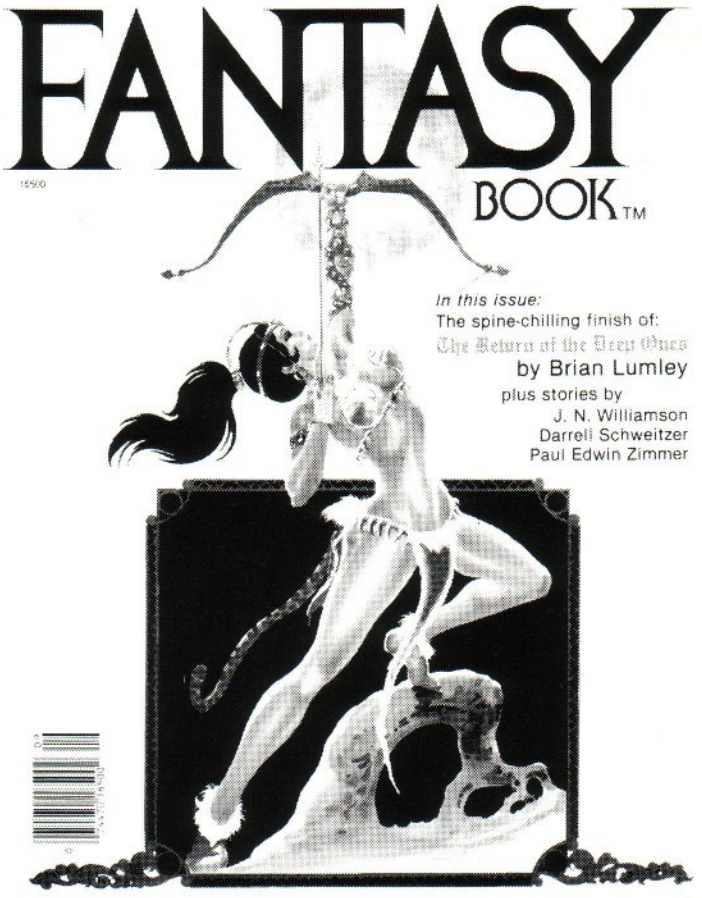

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Space Gamer

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SPECIAL SECTION

Illuminati

SJ Games' ever-popular conspiracy continues to provoke devious little articles, as well as a play-by-mail game and yet another expansion set. The machinations begin on page 20.

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The State of the Art

Welcome to the new, improved Counter Intelligence. This is the editorial page, where we examine the big picture rather than the individual product. Each issue one of us here at ***Space Gamer****, or one of you out there, will have the opportunity to climb on the soapbox and address issues of importance to the gaming community.* ***SG*** *Assistant Editor Allen Varney leads off with his views on the "state of the art" in roleplaying. Let us know what you think.*

—Warren Spector
Editor-in-Chief

"State of the art." This nebulous term occasionally springs up in game reviews. In that context, it refers to some design or game mechanic which represents a benchmark, an advance beyond previous efforts in the form — it's more playable, more "realistic," what have you. All other games of the type are compared to it. What follows is my opinion of what currently constitutes "the state of the art" in one area: roleplaying games.

With the proliferation of RPGs recently, we can see many examples of strong design elements — and many more (*too* many) of weak ones. All this variety gives us plenty of choices in deciding what works best. My criterion is simply *player satisfaction:* not "realism" or simplicity (except incidentally), but how enjoyable the roleplaying experience becomes with these mechanics. With this subjective "fun quotient" in mind, here's what I think belongs in a state-of-the-art design:

Customized character generation. This is apparently still an issue in the hobby, but to my mind random character creation is passe. Point allocation of characteristics may not be more realistic, but it's certainly more *fulfilling* — unless you like the challenge of trying to turn a string of random numbers into a believable personality. Me, I want to shape a character for optimum wish-fulfillment — and not take any guff from dice that tell me otherwise.

No character classes, no alignments, no levels. These are archaic and silly concepts.

Concise attributes and minimal number-crunching. The redundancy of characteristics in most RPGs is depressing. You can convince me that "Dexterity" is really different from "Agility," for example — but not that it makes any measurable difference in gameplay. Likewise "Intelligence" and "Wisdom." Yet numerous designs distinguish these — and provide entirely superfluous number-scores for education, personality, and — woe betide! — "charisma." These are matters of roleplaying, not of numerical values. I say a good design should need no more than four or five attributes, clearly defined and comprehensive.

By "number-crunching" I mean the appalling formulae some games require for figuring hit points, carrying capacity, and similar secondary attributes. I suppose ***Powers & Perils***, the recent The Avalon Hill Game Company game, is the quintessential shameful example. Formulae should be relatively simple or — even better — absent.

Functional mechanics; clear style; sensible organization.

Six-sided dice. This is a chancy statement and an extreme minority opinion — but I feel polyhedral dice are a Bad Idea. They're clunky. They encourage lazy number-crunching design mechanics (witness most TSR releases). They're not widely available except in our own small hobby, and they alienate the general public ("What *are* those things?"). I like Euclidean solids in math books, where they belong.

Six-siders, though, are immediately accessible, elegant, and have millennia of tradition behind them. They call for robust game mechanics, based on the (pardon my rhapsodizing) profound beauty of the bell curve. There is nothing remotely faddish about them.

As for games that use *both* six-sided *and* various polyhedral dice — well, that's just effete.

Adaptability. A state-of-the-art roleplaying system can no longer content itself with one background or era. It's just not practical any more for a group of players to learn yet another complex system every time they want a change of venue; the same system that served them well in ancient Atlantis should support their adventures in Dodge City, or in a comic-book metropolis, or in post-holocaust America, or amid the rings of Saturn. The design should encompass *anything* the players feel like doing.

Now this can be handy if you want to transfer a character from one campaign world to another — to let your superhero wipe out an entire Napoleonic regiment, for example — and I suppose this can lead to some offbeat adventures. It would be senseless to discourage such flamboyance. But for me the prime argument for "universality" in an RPG is mere utility: You can play in a whole new world with the minimum of effort and culture shock, because you already know the system. Some fine-tuning may be needed, but how much less aggravating that is than having to wade through still another rulebook!

Obviously a publisher, too, has some interest in promoting a universal system: Each new "world" for the system will have a built-in audience of players from the previous worlds. Releasing non-compatible games means a publisher must start over with each new design. Fantasy Games Unlimited is an instructive example: With *fourteen* mutually-incompatible roleplaying systems now available from FGU, you have to wonder what's going through the publishers' minds.

Support. The ideal benchmark system should have numerous supplements by talented professionals, published frequently, and a variety of adventures, modules, and useful play-aids. Some kind of magazine providing articles and scenarios for the game would be nice.

Judged by these criteria, most entries in the RPG sweepstakes may be eliminated out of hand. (Note, for instance, that most TSR releases utterly botch every point but the last.) The Chaosium system, based on ***RuneQuest***, is an admirable achievement despite its random character generation and lumpy polyhedra, but requires constant and extensive tinkering from release to release; the Chaosium's games aren't compatible and don't attempt to be. Ragnarok's ***To Challenge Tomorrow*** "generic" system takes a novel and attractive approach to character generation, but has lots of formulae, spotty support, and horrid production values. About Avalon Hill, the less said, the better. Most other publishers don't even pretend to the state of the art.

In my thinking I have returned repeatedly to Hero Games. The small San Mateo company has produced three RPGS to date (***Champions, Espionage!, Justice Inc.***), all working on the "Hero System" of point allocation, six-sided dice (in large quantities), sharp mechanics, adaptability with minor tinkering to several milieu, and admirably clear writing and organization (though I'll never understand why we're told how to throw things in the middle of the character-creation section).

Support for the Hero line has been irregular but is improving, and the ***Adventurers Club*** magazine, now edited by former *SG* editor Aaron Allston, is looking better. So are the games themselves — though in a lot of ways Hero remains a bush-league operation (see the ***Justice Inc.*** review in the capsule section). There are more attributes than necessary in the Hero System, and I can never remember the formulae. But it surpasses the rank and file in so many important respects that I have no misgivings about declaring the Hero System the state of the art.

For now, anyway. □

1977: *Ogre*
Melee
Wizard
1978: *G.E.V.*
1980: *In the Labyrinth*
1981: *Car Wars*
1982: *Illuminati*
1983: The Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame
1984: Designing his biggest project ever . . .

1985:

Steve Jackson's

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Generic Universal RolePlaying System

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Letters

A Speedy Response

Dear Mr. Varney:

While I agree in principle with many of the comments you make in your Counter Intelligence column (*SG* 72), I think there is another side to the story. There can be no denying the primacy of "player satisfaction" in one's evaluation of a game, but what satisfies you may not satisfy others. I'd like to run down your list of state-of-the-art RPG characteristics and comment on a few:

Customized character generation: Implicit in your statement "I want to shape a character for optimum wish-fulfillment" is the assumption that wish-fulfillment is the primary function of roleplaying. I find the joy in roleplaying lies in other areas: interacting with other players and making the best of whatever the die rolls give me. And yes, I enjoy the challenge of turning a string of numbers into a believable personality. When I roleplay, I'm an actor as much as a gamer. How the numbers get on the paper really doesn't matter — as long as I get to ham it up a little.

No character classes, no alignments, no levels: I've had my finest roleplaying experiences with ***Dungeons & Dragons***, which pioneered each of these concepts. It would be hypocritical of me to speak ill of them. In theory, I agree: These are a little silly. In practice, and in combination with random die rolls, they can be valuable aids to roleplaying.

Concise attributes and minimal number-crunching: Amen, brother, amen! — as long as you don't go to the ridiculous extreme of a system like ***The Fantasy Trip***. A little variety — even if it's arbitrary variety — is necessary. And what of those poor souls who don't have the wit or charm to roleplay a high-charisma character? Are they doomed to play the dullards in games as in life? Where's the wish-fulfillment in that?

Six-sided dice: No, no, a thousand times, no! Surely you wouldn't deprive me of the joy of all those odd little dice. I *love* odd little dice. Oh, I suppose I could argue that they provide different probability curves than those dull little cubes you find so elegant, but that would be a mere ploy. I've got *dice fever!* The first person who comes up with a workable hundred-sided die will be enshrined in my personal hall of fame. And what are "robust game mechanics?"

One final word: I admire your courage in going out on a limb and identifying the Hero Games system as the closest thing to a state-of-the-art system currently available. I have no such courage. I'll say only this: My own state-of-the-art system would incorporate both randomly-generated attributes *and* a point allocation system for skills; it would have no character classes, no alignments, and no levels; it would have about four to six concise, non-redundant attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, maybe Charisma, some way to gauge overall physical well-being, like Stamina, and whatever else the game system required; I mean, what would ***Call of Cthulhu*** be without Sanity?); it would use *every kind of die imaginable*; it would most certainly be adaptable to a variety of settings and situations; and it would be well-supported. I guess the Chaosium games come close, but you're right about the lack of flexibility. The new stuff from Pacesetter is in contention, but the ***Chill***, ***Timemaster***, and ***Star Ace*** rules read better than they play, and they're just a tad on the simple side for my taste.

I think I'll wait for the next generation of roleplaying games before sticking my neck out any further than that.

Sincerely,
Warren Spector
Your boss

Noted

Dear Mr. Varney:

All of us here in TSR's Legal Department enjoyed reading your Editorial Commentary "Wretched Excess" which appeared in the July/August 1984 issue of the *Space Gamer* Magazine [70].

However, we find it necessary, and most irresistible, to let you know that to be correct the second paragraph should read:

"And don't forget, this game is a 'Product of Your Imagination™, from TSR®, producers of the ***DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®*** game."

Very truly yours,
Patricia Wollaeger
Legal Department

One More Round with Greenwood

Kind Sirs:

I'd like to thank Don Greenwood for his cogent and well-reasoned letter in *Fantasy Gamer* 6, in which he argued that game designers receive lower royalties than authors for good reasons. Although I disagree in general with his conclusions, his letter was precisely the kind of dialog I wished to provoke when I wrote my original letter, and I thought he made a number of important points.

Greenwood presented two main arguments to support his position. The first was, in essence, that game design is by nature a collaborative effort. I agree, and I accept that this is a good reason to pay designers somewhat lower royalties; I disagree that this is sufficient reason to set designer's royalties at a rate one-fourth of what authors receive.

Greenwood's second argument is that most "professionals" in our field are notably lacking in professionalism. I am forced to agree; I've been involved in the evaluation of outside designs for both SPI and West End Games, and must admit that most designers, including some of the best known and most respected in the industry, seem utterly incapable of competent development.

Agreed, there is a lack of professionalism among so-called professionals. Rather than simply deploring the fact, we should see what we can do to change it.

If game companies begin to insist on a higher degree of professionalism among their designers, and to reward it, designers will be forced to act more professionally. Companies can do this by a) refusing to accept games which are not adequately developed; b) requiring rules rewrites and redevelopment by designers when flaws are found; and c) offering higher rates of pay to adequately developed games.

As someone who tries to make a living as a freelance designer, I'm faced with conflicting incentives. As an artist, I want to do the best job of which I'm capable, and I feel impelled to playtest and polish the games I do extensively. As someone who has to eat, I also know that I have to design and sell at least four games a year in order to survive. There is always a temptation to skimp — and to avoid a last draft of the rules because they're probably good enough and I could be spending the time doing something else; to avoid finding blindtesters because I've played the game enough myself and their results probably won't produce that many changes. It's a temptation I try to avoid, but I don't always succeed; I'd succeed more often if that extra work produced extra income for me.

The simple fact is that it does not. For instance, Avalon Hill recently bought a fantasy game from me. I received their top royalty rate; I knew what it was, and didn't waste time arguing about it because I knew my chance of bettering it was minuscule. Virtually any previously-published designer will receive that same rate — regardless of how polished is his design. At the risk of sounding arrogant, I *know* that the game I submitted was in much better form than most of what Avalon Hill receives — yet I received no preferential treatment as a consequence. The only company I know of which varies its royalty rates for especially polished designs is West End Games.

Don, I'll make a deal with you: the next time I do a game for Avalon Hill, I'll do every rewrite of the rules. If you see a problem, let me know and I'll correct it; if you want me to use a particular rules style, I'll be happy to adopt it. I'll run the blind-testing, and forward you copies of my letters to the testers and their responses. Let me know what you need to make your in-house job easier — and I'll happily comply with your standard forms for map tags, counter manifests, etc. I'll write ad and box-cover text for you, if you like; I'll take the train down to Baltimore to proof the galleys and blues. In short, I'll do everything I can to minimize your in-house staff time and expense — and you'll offer me a royalty rate of 5%, with the extra 2½ points contingent on your being wholly satisfied with my efforts.

Everyone else will want the extra points, of course. Fine; give it to them, if they'll do the same amount of work. Together, perhaps, we'll help to spread professionalism in this industry.

I remain, your humble and obedient servant,
Greg Costikyan

P.S. The figure of 5% is, of course, open to negotiation.

Dear Letter Column:

I wish to take a moment to respond to the letter by Don Greenwood which appeared in the lettercol of the latest issue of *Fantasy Gamer*.

I want to support his general claim which states that game designers almost never do as much final work as book authors. To compare the two markets is in error — they are not the same. At Chaosium we *always* do final work on the product.

However, I must also disagree with Don's statement concerning Avalon Hill policy for names on boxes. He is dead wrong, and should consult with his boss before making such rash statements about when he can put a designer's name on a box.

I recently had two boardgames published by Avalon Hill, which they published without any changes to my submission, *and* we included the camera separations for pieces and board which had to be changed slightly for the Avalon Hill format. Yet my name did not appear on the boxes.

Furthermore, we submitted ***RuneQuest*** in its final format: typeset, art in place, color separations done, and all. We had been told we would have authors' names on the box-front, but were rather surprised when the color proof came back without them. Upon inquiry with the president of AH we were told that it is company policy to keep all names off boxes. The theory is that Avalon Hill company recognition is more important than any author recognition.

I personally disagree with the policy, as can be seen by the profusion of names which appears on all Chaosium products. I do not disagree with Avalon Hill's right to do so, nor is any morality involved. It is a different attitude from mine — not wrong.

But I wish to correct Don on his overstatement. I do not feel he should mislead his potential contributors about AH policy.

Greg Stafford, President
Chaosium, Inc.
Albany, CA

Correction

My mind (which is always set on auto-proofread) caught a slight error in my "Competitive Citizens" article [*SG* 70]. It's in the last sentence of the first paragraph under the heading "Reenlistment and Mustering Out." The sentence reads: "Characters who have served four or more years roll normally on the table." The sentence should read as follows: "Characters who have served four or more *terms* roll normally on the table."

Dan Perez
Houston, TX

A Major New Challenge in Roleplaying:
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TWILIGHT: 2000

Welcome to 2000 AD. World War III began five years ago. It's still going on, but that's the least of your problems. A few days ago, you were soldiers in the U.S. 5th Division. Now you're just fighting to survive while the world falls apart around you.

The real trick in game design is to produce detailed, accurate effects with simple systems. That's what we did in Twilight: 2000.

Combat: Everything from a kick in the head to an artillery barrage on an M1E2 tank is settled by answering three questions: did you hit? where did you hit? and how hard did you hit? Coolness under fire is a major factor in combat—inexperienced characters may panic and freeze.

Skills: There are nearly 50 skills. Any task can be resolved by determining its difficulty and the applicable skill or attribute. Many tasks are described in the rules, and it's easy to resolve others. Skills can be improved by experience, study, and observation.

Survival: Rules are provided for everything needed to keep people and vehicles running: finding food and fuel, repair and maintenance, avoiding radiation and disease—everything from alcohol distillation to grenade fishing.

Encounters: Immense variety of encounters results from a few die rolls: people of all kinds—enemy units, traders, bandits, refugees—plus towns and farmhouses, animals, wrecked vehicles, and more. Rules for NPC motivations quickly flesh out important NPCs with complex motives.

Equipment: All kinds of equipment—the advanced military gear of 1995 and the primitive makeshifts of 2000—are covered. Because vehicles are rare, they can be described in great detail without slowing the game.

Background: Extensive background notes are included: a lengthy chronology of the war's first five years and notes on conditions in central Europe. A beginning adventure, ***Escape from Kalisz***, forms the basis of a whole campaign, with information on enemy units, nearby towns, rumors and prisoner interrogations, and radio traffic, plus an account of the death of 5th division and the division's last issued intelligence briefing.

Modules: GDW will be issuing a series of adventure modules, with new background information for your campaigns. Watch for the first soon: ***The Free City of Krakow***. With a large city militia (once the Polish 8th Motorized Division), working factories, and—so the rumor goes—electric power, Krakow is strong enough to declare its neutrality. It's a major center for what trade remains and—like Istanbul in the 30's—is crawling with the espionage services of both sides.

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Featured Review **by Tony Watson**

Traveller Supplements from Gamelords

During late 1983 and early 1984 a new company called Gamelords, Ltd. made an impressive entrance into the ***Traveller*** play aid market, releasing eight supplements for Game Designers' Workshop's SFRPG.

Contracting with some of the best designers in the field, including the ubiquitous Keith brothers, Gamelords produced a diverse line of attractive, good-quality products. This varied lot falls into several categories: *environment guides*, which concentrate on the circumstances, equipment, and encounters pertinent to a certain planetary environment; *adventures* of the traditional sort (though it's interesting that both Gamelords adventures are related to environment guides); several volumes of *scenario outlines*, offering short synopses of adventures that a referee is required to flesh out; and a guide to the worlds of one space subsector (***A Pilot's Guide to the Drexilthar Subsector,*** *reviewed by William A. Barton on page 8*).

The Environments

The environmental guides are unique in the universe of ***Traveller*** play-aids; they deal entirely with the description, in *considerable* detail, of a single type of planetary environment. There are two of these guides: ***The Mountain Environment*** and ***The Undersea Environment***, both by J. Andrew Keith. ***The Mountain Environment*** explains just about everything the ***Traveller*** referee would want to know about using mountains as a setting for scenarios. A substantial section outlines how a mountain can be modeled for RPG use, including the creation of slopes, faces, and summits, and explaining the effects of pressure, altitude, temperature, and weather. A referee can keep any adventure interesting with the extensive list of special encounters and events, such as various sorts of difficult terrain or nasty weather. But for all the emphasis on geography, the character aspect of mountain adventures hasn't been neglected: A new skill, mountaineering, is introduced, along with the rules to use it in actual "climbs" during adventures. The booklet is rounded out by a long list of mountaineering equipment, an example of a mountain map, and some ideas for possible adventures.

The Undersea Environment shifts from the heights of tall mountains to the depths of alien oceans. Two new skills, swimming and diving, make their appearance. The supplement considers all sorts of pertinent factors, such as pressure, gravity, temperature, decompression after dives, and the effect of the undersea environ on such activities as communication and combat. There are a dozen or so special encounters ("undertow," "entangling weed"), some scenario ideas, and enough underwater gear to keep any futuristic Lloyd Bridges happy.

The tight focus and elaborate detail of these supplements is both their strength and weakness. Just about all aspects of mountain and undersea environments are covered, but I wonder just how much of this material is really going to make its way into the average adven-

ture. For example, is it necessary for you to consult detailed decompression tables for an underwater adventure, or to take the time to prepare a complex mountan map? Maybe not, but if you do, these will certainly provide you with all you need.

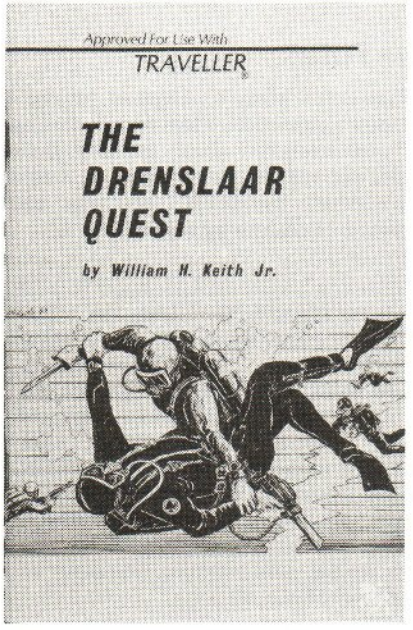
The Adventures

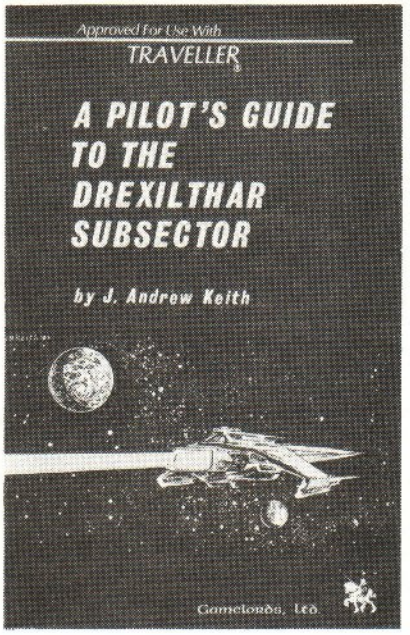
These two adventures fit into the mold that ***Traveller*** players have come to expect: complete scenarios with a beginning, middle, and end; non-player character listing; encounter descriptions; and detailed settings. In this case, the two adventures are tied directly to the environment booklets.

Ascent to Anekthor, by J. Andrew Keith, does not *technically* require the mountain supplement — but since the peak to be scaled, the fourteen-kilometer-high Anekthor on the planet Glenshiel, is designed using the ***Mountain Environment*** formats, its use would certainly be helpful. In fact, about a quarter of the book is devoted to a description and map of the mountain in that format. (The adventure presumes some mountaineering skills among the player-characters, which may be difficult in an ongoing campaign.)

The players join the mountaineering expedition of one Lady Sandra Lockhart, a daredevil noblewoman who has a wager with two other climbing groups. As the expedition progresses, the characters learn that the other groups are willing to resort to some less-than-sporting means to win the bet. Things are complicated by the entrance of the Yn-tsai, the Anekthorian version of the abominable snowman, who are more interesting than the squabbling noble NPCs. ***Ascent to Anekthor*** is certainly not the most inspired of adventures, but the climb, if handled correctly, can be a tense and diverting venture for the players.

William H. Keith's ***The Drenslaar Quest***, at sixty pages and $6.95, is the longest and most extensive play aid in the Gamelords line. On the watery world of Yarfahl, the players





are approached by a native of Ildrissar, a world rebelling against the government of the Carillian Assembly. An important consignment of weaponry was lost when the 1800-ton transport ship *Drenslaar* was shot down by Assembly forces over the neutral world of Yarfahl. The ship is now wrecked under the ocean, awaiting salvage . . . and that's where the player-characters come into the picture. The bulk of the booklet is devoted to describing the particulars of the salvage operation. Assembly naval patrols and the very nasty Yarfahlian sea life keep things interesting, but weather and the dangers of the actual salvage work are often the real excitement. Since so much of the adventure takes place underwater, ***The Undersea Environment*** is of obvious utility here. The adventure is very complete, including deck plans for the *Drenslaar* as well as Yarfahlian ocean craft. The animal descriptions are particularly good.

The two adventures reviewed here are solid, playable offerings, but it's clear that they gain their strength from their unique environments, allowing for the maximum use of the two environment supplements Gamelords offers.

Encounters and Scenarios

The remaining three play aids fall into a general category of encounters and scenario outlines. They are something between environments and full-fledged adventures.

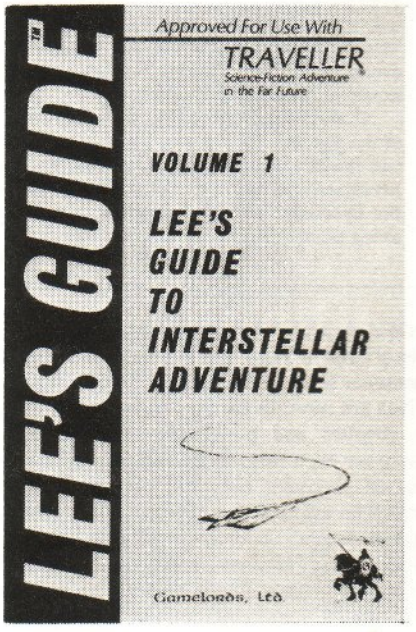
Lee's Guide to Interstellar Adventure, by Gregory P. Lee, is part planetary description, part scenario, and all very good. Ten of its eleven entries begin with a listing of the Universal Planetary Profile code ranges acceptable for the planet on which the adventure is set. (The eleventh deals with xboat space routes.) Especially thoughtful is a listing of the worlds that meet these qualifications within the Solomani Rim and Spinward Marches sectors (both of which have been treated in GDW supplements, and thus are likely to be available to ***Traveller*** refs).

Each entry gives a brief sketch of the world, highlighting any unique physical, climatic, political, and economic aspects. The designer has extrapolated scenario ideas from these characteristics that take advantage of each world's nature. There's a mercenary adventure, a quest for water on a desert world, several mining ventures, and a fascinating scenario set on a world that has recently suffered a devastating nuclear war. Lee provides the basic idea for the scenario along with some indications of plot twists, motivations, and complications. NPCs, if described at all, are offered in the barest of terms; the emphasis is on interesting scenario ideas with plots that aren't heavily predetermined. The details are left to the referee, who can customize the story to fit any campaign. A solid, original effort.

One enduring locale for starting off adventures, meeting patrons, and just generally getting into some trouble has been the Startown area surrounding every planet's starport. With its shady businesses, seedy bars, and treacherous denizens, Startown is often an important stop along the route of an unfolding plot. Dedicated to "Greedo and the whole cantina gang," John Marshal's ***Startown Liberty*** is a guide to encounters and events in the area surrounding a world's port of call.

Startown Liberty is divided into three sections. The first is a series of encounter tables for the streets of Startown. Entries for each of the encounters provide some general information ("you encounter a shabbily dressed beggar" or "your party is approached by several of the local police") and several possible outcomes for the encounter, determined by die roll. The occasional tourist encountered can be harmless or finger the player group as muggers; the Marines on leave can offer to buy the party a round of drinks or lapse into challenging insults; and so forth.

The next two sections follow the same format. "Entertainment Tonight" describes the



A PILOT'S GUIDE TO THE DREXILTHAR SUBSECTOR (Gamelords, Ltd.); $5.95. Designed by J. Andrew Keith. One 6'' x 9'' 48-page booklet. Published 1984.

Past ***Traveller*** supplements designed to delineate a certain segment of space in which player-characters could adventure have always concentrated on the sector level, providing 16 subsectors full of planets as a backdrop for adventuring. Examples are GDW's ***Spinward Marches*** or ***Solomani Rim***. As a result, information on various planets had to be sketchy — usually only their universal planetary profiles. Now, Gamelords and J. Andrew Keith, with ***A Pilot's Guide to the Drexilthar Subsector***, have broken this trend by presenting a supplement for ***Traveller*** that covers only *one* subsector in the Keiths' Reavers' Deep sector.

In limiting this booklet to only the single Drexilthar subsector, Keith is thus able to provide background information on the 27 worlds in the subsector at a depth never before available in a ***Traveller*** release (except in an adventure focusing on a single world). Following introductory sections giving the history of Reavers' Deep and the Drexilthar subsector and providing a world list of Drexilthar, the main part of the book is devoted to descriptions of the individual planets that run up to a page and a half in length. (Still brief, but infinitely better than a mere string of numbers.) There are paragraphs on each world's sun, planetary system, and the main world itself and any other major planets in that system. Then come remarks on features or circumstances of the planet that are of potential interest to a group of player-characters seeking planetfall or to a referee looking for scenario ideas.

Drexilthar is a well-constructed supplement with a wealth of ideas for ***Traveller*** play. Its fuller world descriptions makes previous such releases pale in comparison. The astronomical and planetary data included saves one the trouble of having to generate that information with GDW's overly complex system in ***Scouts***. Several of the briefly described situations on various worlds could easily become springboards for further adventure in the hands of creative referees.

The only thing about this subsector that I don't find attractive is the high percentage of worlds that are either mining worlds or are in some way under the heel of the Dakaar Corporation or one of the Imperial megacorporations. This corporate theme is one that is becoming overworked in ***Traveller***, and I'd have preferred to see less of it here.

Overall, though, if you're tired of the worlds of the Spinward Marches or the Solomani Rim and haven't created your own subsector for adventure, you might find ***A Pilot's Guide to the Drexilthar Subsector*** your key to an interesting place to hang your vacc-suit helmet.

—William A. Barton

WANTED: ADVENTURERS (Gamelords, Ltd.); $5.95. Designed by John Marshal. One 6'' x 9'' 48-page booklet. Published 1984.

Wanted: Adventurers is a book of short potential adventure situations for ***Traveller*** player-characters, much like Gamelords' earlier ***Lee's Guide to Interstellar Space*** adventure. In this supplement, each adventure situation is keyed in to a particular want ad from a list the referee may present to the players. Once the party has chosen the ad they wish to answer, the referee may use it to build an adventure situation (or situations, as some may allow). Ads range from positions available for bodyguards, security personnel, insurance investigators, zoo hunters, or combat teams to starships for sale, an engineer seeking employment, a damsel needing help to retrieve her kidnapped brother, and a Learning Exchange where new skills may be picked up, old ones taught for cash, or jobs secured. Descriptions of each ad's situation average a page and a half. Some are quite straightforward; others have hidden twists to the story that the players might not discover until too late.

Most of the scenarios outlined in ***Wanted: Adventurers*** are intriguing hooks that a clever referee can turn into exciting adventure situations. My favorites are one in which the players are hired as brokers and end up with a consignment of deadly leapsnakes, which manage to get loose in the characters' ship; and an ad for veterans that, if answered, will strand the adventurers at an arctic outpost in the midst of a mutiny. Both offer lots of possibilities. The idea of tying such situations to want ads is a good one, even if it has been used before (in GDW's ***Expedition to Zhodane***, being one of the few innovative ideas in that adventure). It allows the players a wider range of adventure situations than merely whatever the ref's managed to work out for tonight.

One potential problem with these scenario ideas is that several don't lead to actual adventures, but only put the player-characters in positions where they might encounter a patron or otherwise stumble onto an adventure, so a referee is still going to have to make up the actual scenarios himself. One, the Learning Exchange, not only isn't an adventure, it probably won't even lead to one unless the referee has one of his own for which he can use the exchange to ''supply'' the adventurers (if they're using it for job referrals).

Still, with the right blend of imagination and improvisation, ***Wanted: Adventurers*** could offer a ***Traveller*** referee several ''jumping-off'' points for crafting a number of interesting gaming scenarios. And the fact that the length of each situation requires some descriptions to be a bit vague means that it won't take a lot of work to convert many of the scenario sketches in ***Wanted: Adventurers*** to other SFRPG systems — always a plus in the gaming biz.

—William A. Barton

various nightclub, bar, dive, and casino activities offered in Startown. It includes a different encounter table for each level of establishment (dives are more likely than nightclubs to turn up rowdies and prostitutes, for example). There are even rules about drinking and its effect on character abilities! The last section deals with criminal encounters, and offers entries on fences, undercover police operatives, and snitches. ***Startown Liberty*** is a fine way to provide a playing group with diversion, red herrings, or a necessary contact.

The final supplement in this category is ***Wanted: Adventurers***, also by John Marshal. (*See William A. Barton's capsule review above.*) The scenarios here are a varied bunch and should appeal to just about any sort of group. Surely *something* should interest the players — and unlike single scenario adventures, the twenty outlines in ***Wanted: Adventurers*** ensure the booklet will have some enduring use as something for the strapped referee to reach for when a quick scenario is needed.

Kudos and Caveats

The overall physical presentation of the Gamelords supplements is very nice. They are printed in the familiar 8½'' x 5½'' size that ***Traveller*** players are familiar with. All but one of the books are illustrated by William H. Keith, whose drawings are synonymous with ***Traveller***. Misspellings, typos, and other errors have been kept to a minimum.

More importantly, the supplements are imaginative, diverse, and useful. There are a lot of good ideas contained within their pages, and their wide-ranging natures ensure that there will be *something* of value to any campaign.

Of the group, I was especially impressed with the three encounter and scenario booklets. ***Startown Liberty***, ***Lee's Guide***, and ***Wanted: Adventurers*** strike me as being particularly versatile and thoughtful; these are good gaming values. The guide to the Drexilthar subsector (*see William A. Barton's capsule review at left*) is useful for the referee who wants a prepared subsector for adventure settings, but is decidedly less so for the campaign set in other locales. Although the environment guides may well be too detailed for most campaigns, they are certainly a novel idea and show a considerable amount of research and thought. ***The Drenslaar Quest*** and ***Assault on Anekthor*** provide ready means of implementing the environment guides, but I didn't find them exceptionally good on their own.

One criticism that can be leveled at the entire Gamelords line is the price of the supplements. At $5.95 ($6.95 for ***The Drenslaar Quest***) they're a buck or two more expensive than comparable GDW products. Picking up ***The Underwater Environment*** and the accompanying ***Drenslaar*** adventure will cost the gamer a dollar more than the basic ***Traveller*** three-book set (and $3 more than ***Starter Traveller***) or the more substantial ***The Traveller Adventure***. But if you're not counting pennies, these are fine purchases and several are excellent values at the $6 asking price. Any would be a useful addition to a ***Traveller*** library.

The Future

Gamelords plans to continue producing ***Traveller*** supplements. More titles in the planetary environments series (covering arctic, jungle, and sea surface environs), as well as pilot's guides, encounters, and ''want ads'' are slated. I look forward to them. □

Traveller *play aids (Gamelords, Ltd.):* ***The Mountain Environment***, *$5.95, J. Andrew Keith, 48 pages;* ***The Drenslaar Quest***, *$6.95, William H. Keith, 60 pages;* ***Ascent to Anekthor***, *$5.95, J. Andrew Keith, 54 pages;* ***Startown Liberty***, *$5.95, John Marshal, 48 pages;* ***Lee's Guide to Interstellar Adventure***, *$5.95, Gregory Lee, 48 pages. All are 8½'' x 5½'' booklets. For referee and an indefinite number of players; playing time indefinite. Published in 1983 and 1984.*

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And These Just In:

THE DESERT ENVIRONMENT (Gamelords, Ltd.); $6.95. Written by William H. Keith, Jr. Supplement to ***Traveller***. 8½" x 5½" 54-page booklet with illustrations by the author. Published 1984.

The Desert Environment is another in Gamelords' series of "environments" — supplements intended to provide in-depth treatment of terrain/climate types and render their unique aspects into terms suitable for ***Traveller*** sessions. In this case, the subject is the desert, allowing the ***Traveller*** ref to conduct adventures in the wastes of alien worlds. The booklet introduces a new environmental skill, desert survival, which improves a character's chances when traveling through the desert. This is important, since most of the rules are devoted to the physical effects of the harsh climate, introducing an elaborate "endurance loss" system to keep track of a character's condition. Other sections cover desert terrain, equipment (including something very much like the Fremen stillsuits from *Dune*), adventures in the desert, and a variety of dangers and inconveniences, such as sandstorms, heat stroke, and vehicle breakdown.

Like the other volumes in the environment series, this one is highly detailed, covering just about every aspect of desert adventuring likely to come up in the course of play. It seems that Keith has been especially thorough in his research on the topic; the explanation of the different types of dunes and terrain to be found in the desert is very interesting, as is the section describing the construction and use of a solar still. The notes on the placement of deserts on world maps are especially appreciated.

Weaknesses of the supplement are few. One could turn the praise for completeness on its head and criticize ***The Desert Environment*** for being *too* complex and detailed in some areas. The endurance loss system, while apparently realistic, may prove too tedious and unwieldy during play. The referee could find himself too absorbed in accounting for the effects of temperature and when the characters last ate, drank, or slept (in order to keep track of endurance point loss) to keep his mind on the plot of the adventure at hand. Another problem with the book is the price; at $6.95, ***The Desert Environment***'s tariff is a little high for what you get. Gamelords' ***Traveller*** supplements and adventures have consistently been very good; unfortunately, they have also been rather expensive.

The Desert Environment is recommended if your campaign includes desert adventures. This book should provide all the information necessary to really set the scene. The referee who wishes to have a complete set of environmental guides, for those situations that crop up unexpectedly, may also wish to purchase this supplement. However, if a given ***Traveller*** campaign doesn't really require the specialization and detail of ***The Desert Environment***, the high price for this item should be enough to scare off the casual buyer.

—Tony Watson

DUNERAIDERS (Gamelords, Ltd.); $6.95. Written by William H. Keith, Jr. An adventure for ***Traveller***. 8½" x 5½" 58-page booklet with illustrations by the author. Published 1984.

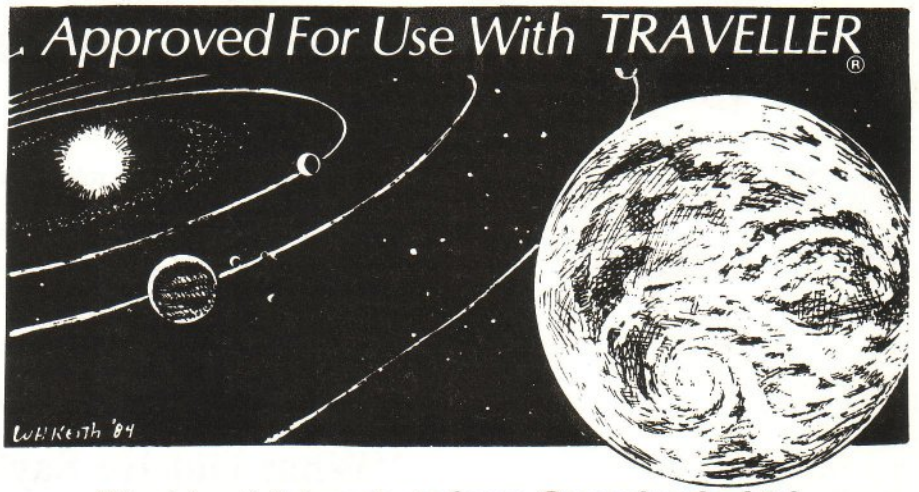
Duneraiders is an adventure for ***Traveller*** set on the desert world of Tashrakaar in the Drexilthar subsector of the Reaver's Deep sector, the setting for a number of other Gamelords ***Traveller*** products. Rival offworld mining firms are competing to skim the mineral wealth of the ancient dry seabeds of the planet while braving the dangers of sandstorms, the harsh climate, and raids by desert nomads. The adventurers are drawn into local economic-political affairs when they sign on as security troubleshooters for the Jericorp mining operations on the planet. Saboteurs are trying to prevent Jericorp from making its lease payment on its mining area, leaving it open to control by a rival company.

The adventure borrows several motifs from Frank Herbert's *Dune* books. The desert nomads, "Duneraiders," are semi-technological warriors, fierce fighters, suspicious of offworlders, and have unique cultural traditions about water — not unlike Arrakis' Fremen. Ore is gathered by giant orecrawlers, reminiscent of spice factories. The Mark XIV orecrawler is one of the most interesting things in the adventure: At 1200 tons, it is larger than many starships and capable of long-range independent operation. The designer has provided deck plans and several illustrations of the orecrawler. Similarly, the detail in the NPC sketches and Duneraider tribes fleshes out the adventure considerably.

In several instances the adventure refers to ***The Desert Environment***, a volume in Gamelords' environment series; it would be particularly useful should the characters have to travel overland on foot. While not strictly necessary, the ref may find it useful to have this play aid on hand. A more telling criticism of the adventure is its price; $6.95 is a fair amount of money for a RPG adventure.

The scenario in ***Duneraiders*** is a good one, backed up by some interesting detail and local color. There's a good feeling for adventure in the dry wastes of the deep desert, and just about any playing group should find the situation challenging. Now if only there were some sandworms.

–Tony Watson



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Featured Review

TOON

by R.A. Greer
Hero Games

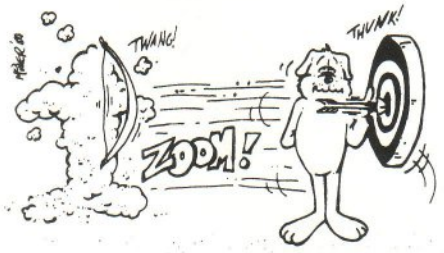
So you say you have the roleplaying blues. The spirit of carefree abandon is gone now that you're 53rd level. You just don't seem to have 38 hours a week any more to keep up with all the cosmic political factions in your friends' star-spanning campaign. All the rulebooks and players' notes and character sheets and funny dice and battle boards and bags of potato chips are weighing down your fun. Well, wake up, my friend, the answer is at hand! From the far-off mystical land of Texas, where the savages bake in the sun until their brains boil, comes ***TOON***! ***TOON*** is a quick cure for all your roleplaying ills, a fast-acting balm to be applied directly to your funny bone, speeding you back to those uncomplicated days of roleplaying when it was *fun*!

"What Did He Say?"

To put it another way, Steve Jackson Games has had the good grace to publish a wonderful game about a delightful topic. ***TOON*** really *is* the roleplaying game of cartoons, funny animals, zany shticks, and insane adventures. Designed by Greg Costikyan (who helped develop West End Games' ***Paranoia***) and developed by Warren Spector (who wrote his Master's thesis on Warner Brothers cartoons), ***TOON*** is a very elegant little game that capitalizes on the simplicity of the silly cartoon genre. The 64-page rulebook is filled with really funny line art by Kyle Miller and lots of one-column "sidebars" filled with classic cartoon bits to use as you play the game: sawing through tree branches, self-willed shadows, portable holes, even earthquake pills. ***TOON*** is a joy to read, worth the cover price ($8.95) just for all the memories of great cartoons it conjures up.

"But What Can I Do With It?"

The mechanical part of ***TOON*** is very simple. Five important game statistics have to be rolled up (on one six-sided die): Muscle, Zip, Smarts, Chutzpah (nerve), and Hit Points. From these numbers you determine 23 skills (like Run, Fight, Set Trap, and Pass Shoddy Goods), and you have thirty skill points to customize your character by improving starting skill levels and buying "shticks." (Shticks are those incredible powers some characters seem to have, like smelling carrots at 100 yards or outrunning cannon balls.)



Character generation is fast. Inside of eight minutes, I had rolled up Dudley Dog, chief slugger and second basemen for the Bangor Bowsers. Dudley even got a few dominant beliefs and character goals from the character generation section. Presto! I was ready to play ***TOON***! The system did everything for me but draw my character.

All combat, or actions of any kind, require the player simply to roll the appropriate skill number or less on two six-sided dice. The spread for skill numbers is 1-9, so there's always a good chance the character will fail — which is often more fun than succeeding. Turn length is based on activity; each time a player makes a skill roll, it becomes the next player's turn. Mechanically speaking, ***TOON*** is easy and moves incredibly fast.

"How Fast Is Fast?"

One of the great strengths and inherent weaknesses of RPGs is that they go on seemingly forever. *TOON* is designed to be played within a time limit. A three-player "Short Subject" scenario can be run in one hour — *exactly*. Classic cartoon characters seem to pop up in the strangest places, having all manner of adventures that had to be wrapped up by "the last reel." The same holds true for *TOON:* The Animator (gamemaster) explains the setting and goals of the "cartoon" (adventure) to the players, allows 20 minutes of real time for each player involved (30 minutes for a "Feature Film"), and the players go for it.

Through the device of real-time play, *TOON* develops a very fresh alternative to character death. No self-respecting cartoon character ever *really* dies, no matter what happens to him. The little Martian in the sneakers may have been squashed into his helmet all the way down to his ankles, but we all know he'll be back before the last reel to trouble our long-eared hero. In *TOON*, characters don't die, they "Fall Down." When you run out of Hit Points, you sit on the sidelines for three minutes, watching the other people have fun — then your character is back in the game again, as good as new. Unlike most gamers, *TOON* players need not fear character death; thus even the most careful, thinking roleplayer becomes a zany madman. I saw this "*TOON* Effect" in a game with people who had never seen an RPG before, along with a few veteran gamers; pandemonium is infectious!

Also contained in this humble game of craziness is a maxim that should be taken to heart by *every* gamemaster, for *every* game. When faced with a question you need answered, but you don't have time to think about it in mid-game, use the *TOON Fifty Percent Rule* (patent pending). Reduce the problem to a yes-or-no question and roll a die. On 1-3, the answer is "yes"; on 4-6 the answer is "no." Armed with this tool for gamemastering, an Animator can keep the pace moving at lightning speed with very little preparation. For a "real-time" game, such a rule is required . . . so the Animator's brain doesn't overload.

"Gosh, It's Got A Hole In It"

Yes, for all its lightheartedness, *TOON* has some real problems for both players and gamemaster. The rules exalt the wonder of being silly — the *TOON* player mottos are "Forget everything you know" and "Act before you think." Unfortunately, the game falls down and dies if either the Animator or *any* of the players aren't in the crazy "cartoon spirit." Nowhere in *TOON* is there a way to set the mood and warm up the players. Nowhere does it spell out the classic plotlines for the gamemaster.

This game does not lend itself to anything but the old slapstick classics. You'll not find room in *TOON* for the modern Stone-Age family from Bedrock — or your favorite moose and squirrel — without a good deal of work. Goal orientation and motivation aren't explained very well; there are a few examples listed, but they're easily exhausted and there are no parameters to build others. Examples of craziness hide primarily in the sidebars and will probably be missed in the first reading of the rules, when they're needed most. This game is so easy in all other ways — a list of classic "bits," goals, motivators, and beliefs would have been a real help. The tips that *were* given were great, but nothing tied them all together in the end. Even a page or two on the overall cartoon genre would have been appreciated.

As for the adventures, all but one felt really contrived, and only through the good graces of fun-loving players did they work at all. There really isn't enough information at the beginning of each adventure to allow a new ref to run the five sample cartoons. In addition, the adventures instruct the Animator to reward players with "Plot Points" (experience points) for solving problems in sly and crafty ways, yet all through the rules players are told to act crazy and disregard pre-planning. Mixed signals make for poor results.

"But It Is Kinda Cute"

TOON is a gem for those willing to work with it a little bit. (The game should have been published with a qualified Animator stapled inside.) It may not replace the weekly fantasy game, but it's a great change of pace. It is also a great introduction to roleplaying for those new to the hobby and really allows experienced gamers to let down their hair. Almost all of *TOON*'s problems can be solved by applying this simple maxim:

"If you want to do it, exaggerate it; if it's simple, complicate it; if you're in a jam, take all steps possible to make it worse."

Follow these simple rules and you'll advance the plot and add to the fun. Congratulations to Steve Jackson Games on a job well done. □

Example of Play

The Short Subject: *Spaced Out Saps* — The Place: GenCon '84 — The action: fast and furious. Here's what happened:

Mack the Mouse, an unnamed Gremlin, Harey Houdini, Fred the Dog, a little green man (from Mars, of course, where else?), a Tasmanian Devil, Dr. Nutzenboltz, and a host of other cartoon characters were charged with investigating some mysterious activity on the Moon but since this was a *TOON* scenario (and *TOON* scenarios hardly ever go the way the Animator intends them to), they decided instead that it would be a lot more fun to mug, drug, slug, and otherwise discombobulate one another, the action getting underway as Harey Houdini reached into his Bag of Many Things in an attempt to find a deadly weapon with which to pound his fellow cartoon stars, but he failed his shtick roll and so he didn't get a deadly weapon but instead got a family of four seated around a dinner table, and then, just to confuse things even more, the little green man from Mars in the party asked the very odd question, "Do I recognize anybody at the table?" a question for which the very confused Animator had no answer so he (I) decided there would never be a better opportunity to apply the Fifty Percent Rule, so he (I) said to myself, "Okay, does the little green man from Mars recognize anybody at the table?" rolled one die which came up 1, meaning the answer was "Yes," did a little fast thinking and turned to the little green man from Mars saying, "Yes, you recognize the family seated around the dinner table because they're all Martians!" and when the little green man from Mars in the party saw all the little green men seated around the dinner table, he teamed up with them and they all got out their disintegrator rays and started blasting the Earthlings in the group and the whole thing turned into a nasty free-for-all that got completely out of hand (which tends to happen a lot in *TOON* especially when the characters completely forget about the goals set for them at the beginning of the adventure which also happens a lot) as the Gremlin kept trying to teleport over to the Martians so he could take their rayguns apart but usually ended up in the gun barrels (where he got blasted), and in general everybody spent a half-hour or so Falling Down a bunch, and, oh yeah, I forgot to mention the incident where Dr. Nutzenboltz produced an atom bomb from *his* Bag of Many Things, set it off and did one whole die of damage (like just about everything in *TOON*) which, when rolled, came up a one, so everyone took *one* point of damage from (what we can only assume was) a dud bomb and you'll never believe what happened when a cow appeared on the scene (this was a *TOON* game and that sort of thing is bound to happen) and the Tasmanian Devil swallowed it whole using Harey Houdini as a toothpick and then eating him *too*, but of course the cow and Harey didn't die because nobody ever dies in *TOON* and Harey got the bright idea of milking the cow *inside* the Tasmanian Devil's stomach, and the Tasmanian Devil got fuller and fuller and fatter and fatter until finally the cow and Harey poured out of the Tasmanian Devil's mouth (a move which completely boggled the Animator and got Harey Houdini a plot point) and then the *other* little green men on the Moon (the ones the players *never* got around to investigating) blew up the . . . but that would be telling.

—Warren (gasp) Spector

PARANOIA

GREETINGS, CITIZEN OF ALPHA COMPLEX! The new roleplaying game ***Paranoia*** will allow you to serve The Computer as a Troubleshooter. Trust The Computer. The Computer is your friend.

The Computer is completely, full-tilt, around-the-bend insane. Just thought you ought to know.
—Ben-R-GOX-1
Humanist

The Computer has assigned you to root out Commies and traitors in your beloved Alpha Complex. You must execute them with the equipment generously provided by The Computer. WARNING: Damaging The Computer's property is treason punishable by execution.

Most of your equipment is junk. It will malfunction or explode as soon as you use it. Keep this in mind.
—Tony-G-VAD-2
Death Leopard

You and your fellow Troubleshooters must eliminate traitorous mutants and members of secret societies. If you find that a fellow Troubleshooter is a traitor, you must terminate him or her immediately. Your fellow Troubleshooters would do the same for you.

And probably will. Repeatedly.

You and your fellow Troubleshooters ARE mutants *and* members of secret societies. Isn't this fun?

West End Games' ***Paranoia*** is one of a new breed of RPGs. They stress atmosphere and evocation of a certain mood instead of flexible mechanics or long-term playability. These games are, if you will, the "short story" forms of the field, while the ongoing campaigns of full-scale open-ended games are "novel-length" adventures. You don't play ***Paranoia*** or ***TOON*** (for instance) as long-term undertakings; they don't offer enough variety. But as a change of pace, these games can produce an intense roleplaying experience.

Also, your characters die too often. ***Paranoia*** characters can die while being issued equipment for their first adventure.

Paranoia creates its effects much as ***TOON*** does — understandable, since Greg Costikyan designed ***TOON*** and did principal development of ***Paranoia*** (with Eric Goldberg). Both use an entertaining rules style to put players in the proper mood; both stress gamemaster creativity and a frenzied pace over sophisticated mechanics. Perhaps most interesting (if not most important), both ***Paranoia*** and ***TOON*** encourage spirited play by making character mortality farcical. Just as you "Fall Down" in ***TOON*** and come back three minutes later, so in ***Paranoia*** you're given six identical clones as your "character." Whenever your current clone hits the cemetery (recycler?), a new one is activated. You pick right up with the new clone.

The "Dramatic Tactical System" in ***Paranoia*** requires the GM to know the rules *cold* because the action must be kept moving as rapidly as possible. The summarized advice, *which players should not find out*, is as follows:

1. KEEP THINGS MOVING.
2. Don't give them time to think.
3. Reward flamboyance and strange ideas.
4. Kill the bastards.
5. Most important, KEEP THINGS MOVING.

Unfortunately, this idea doesn't work as well in ***Paranoia*** as in ***TOON***. Only when The Computer knows you're dead can it dispatch your replacement to rejoin the action. If the Troubleshooters are deep in an adventure and can't "file a report" with The Computer when your character dies, you're pretty much out of the game for the rest of the session.

Why doesn't The Computer catch on to a clone's mutant power after its first few predecessors exhibit exactly the same power?

Paranoia's components are glossy and attractive: the brief, intentionally vague ***Player Handbook***, the ***Gamemaster Handbook*** (security clearance ULTRAVIOLET — in other words, nobody but the GM is allowed to know how the game is actually *played*), and the ***Adventure Handbook*** (likewise). All these are hilarious reading (if you're cleared for them), and Jim Holloway's illustrations complement the text perfectly. Also included are two percentile dice and the funniest errata sheet in the industry. The ***Adventure Handbook*** provides exactly one scenario, along with six pregenerated characters to allow a quick start to play. In this lengthy and devious adventure, the Troubleshooters investigate [redacted], where the [redacted] are malfunctioning and a valuable [redacted] has been [redacted] by [redacted]; but to tell more would invite censorship.

DO NOT QUESTION THE COMPUTER. TRUST THE COMPUTER. THE COMPUTER IS YOUR FRIEND.

I'M SORRY THIS INFORMATION IS *NOT* AVAILABLE. AT YOUR SERVICE!

Typically, the Troubleshooters will die several times during the adventure. When a new ***Paranoia*** player reported to Eric Goldberg of West End Games that his entire party survived the scenario, Goldberg said, "You have a defective copy! Return it immediately!"

The game system features a couple of innovations beyond the "Dramatic Tactical System." Following its premise of simplicity in mechanics, ***Paranoia*** dispenses with "hit points" and similar quantifiers. A character is either healthy, stunned, incapacitated, or dead (or, in truly distinguished circumstances, entirely vaporized). When you think about it, you realize that this is all you really need to know about a given character's status. Likewise, movement is an abstract matter of walking, running, and sprinting; weapon ranges are simply short, medium, and long. This approach, however simplistic, encourages the fluid action and creativity essential to a successful ***Paranoia*** game. (Also, it tends to

FEATURED REVIEW

by the Staff of *Space Gamer*

keep players in the dark about their situation, which is in the spirit of ***Paranoia***.)

Other features of the game display the same originality, but less elegance. For example, your current standing with The Computer is expressed in "commendation points" and "treason points"; when your treason total exceeds your commendation total by 10, you're a traitor . . . and you better start running! But it would have been simpler to have just one kind of point, and a sliding scale. (Especially when you also have to keep track of "secret society points," "skill points," and money — too much bookkeeping!)

Similarly, the "skill trees" attempt to arrange all player skills in a rigid hierarchy; e.g., you have to know "Aimed Weapon Combat" and "Projectile Weapons" before you can use a specific projectile-weapon skill like "needlegun." This is a good idea. But the execution (an appropriate word in a ***Paranoia*** review) is flawed: it *looks* clumsy; the formula for figuring success percentages is arbitrary and hard to remember; and some players just flat out can't understand it in its current form. Also, the randomly-generated attributes are redundant, and the figured "secondary attribute" bonuses are practically meaningless in play (not to mention contrary to the freewheeling spirit of the game). It appears the designers couldn't muster the courage to dispense with *all* the clunky RPG mechanics they vilify.

Paranoia succeeds admirably — sometimes brilliantly — in creating a mood of fear and distrust. In a slightly warped way, it fits with *horror* RPGs like ***Call of Cthulhu*** and Pacesetter's ***Chill***. But these games — and their inspiration, fright movies and literature — produce a catharsis through the discovery and banishment of evil. ***Paranoia***'s psychology is completely different: the fear *never* goes away! You'll *never* understand what's really going on. When your current clone gets lasered in the back by his lieutenant, the situation has indeed been resolved (in a sense) — but your new clone will wake up into the same nightmare world, where he can't even mow down his predecessor's assassin without committing two or three kinds of treason. In this environment, only the game's absurdist attitude will keep you going.

So there are frustrations in ***Paranoia*** — but there is enormous exhilaration too, an adrenalin high that comes from living on full alert every minute. The game system is not for the number-crunchers who want exact percentage chances for everything, novice GMs who have trouble keeping a session rolling along, or players who want relaxation and easygoing fantasy. And if you're likely to take it personally when your best friend's character plugs *your* character from behind, *stay away from this game*. But if you like high-tension suspense along with a slightly bent sense of humor, ***Paranoia*** is a unique and highly desirable experience. □

The ***Player Handbook*** includes one of the best introductory solo adventures you're ever likely to encounter: concise yet involved, novel in approach, funny, and embodying nearly all the important mechanics and attitudes the poor bewildered player will need to master.

Some mutations: Chameleon, Combat Mind, Telepathic Sense, Matter Eater, Trance Teleport, and the incredibly treasonous Machine Empathy. Secret societies include the Commies, PURGE, the Illuminati, First Church of Christ Computer-Programmer, and the Sierra Club.

Fair Warning: This is an internal contradiction in the ***Paranoia*** design philosophy which can sink the game if you're not careful. The designers want a fast-paced, fluid game — but then they require combat to be resolved on a really nightmarish table, and insist on separate die rolls for hitting with a shot, damage done, and hit location. It slows the pace to a crawl. The fundamental disparity created by such wishy-washy thinking would kill most games — and ***Paranoia*** survives only through the novelty and pervasiveness of its atmosphere. To repeat: The GM has to know the rules *cold*.

PARANOIA IS FUN. OTHER GAMES ARE NOT FUN. BUY ***PARANOIA***.

In a touch of pure Costikyan deviltry, the players — who are *never* supposed to know what's going on — are neatly prevented from just sneaking a look at the GM's books. Any player caught displaying knowledge of their contents immediately earns a treason point!

When you are asked "Have you read ***Paranoia***?" by someone you suspect you'll be playing it with, your only wise response — even if you know all three books — is, "Just the ***Player Handbook***." The game influences your behavior even when you're not playing it — a true "meta-game."

ATTENTION CITIZENS. THIS EVENING'S MEAL WILL BE FOODS 3, 11, AND DESSERT 2-C. THE COMPUTER IS YOUR FRIEND.

Long-term playability is another thorny question. Certainly the scenario provided with the game has *no* potential as an ongoing campaign. Ideas for subsequent adventures are suggested; but by the game's very nature, the players will never work effectively as a team. And the atmosphere, ***Paranoia***'s greatest strength, is so nerve-wracking that playing an ongoing game would be like setting up housekeeping on a roller-coaster. There's a point at which any pleasure becomes painful — ***Paranoia*** may be that point.

PARANOIA *(West End Games); $15. Designed by Dan Gelber; developed by Greg Costikyan, Eric Goldberg, and Ken Rolston. Three 8½" x 11" rulebooks (24-page* ***Player Handbook,*** *64-page* ***Gamemaster Handbook,*** *and 52-page* ***Adventure Handbook*** *with removable cardstock cover), errata sheet with at least three good jokes, two inked 20-sided dice. For four or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.*

Interview:

GREG COSTIKYAN

Greg Costikyan writes:

"I was born in 1959 in New York Hospital in the County, City, and State of New York, which I guess makes me as much of a New Yorker as it's possible to be. My father (Edward N.) is a prominent lawyer and one-time head of Tammany Hall; my mother (Frances H.) lives in Oregon, and is currently working as a freelance writer. Like most people with any brains, I detested high school; I survived it by spending most of my time hanging around SPI, which was the best place around to learn the craft of game design. (I also published half a million words of fanzines.) I attended Brown University, in H.P. Lovecraft's home town of Providence, and was graduated in 1982 with a degree in "Geology-Physics/Mathematics," my senior thesis being "Core Formation by Stokes Settling in the Icy Satellites of Jupiter." I decided to see if it was possible to survive as a freelance game designer. The question is still open, but at least I've managed to pay the rent so far. I live in Jersey City with an Apple and a Gestetner."

This interview was conducted by phone in October 1984. The interviewers were Allen Varney and Warren Spector.

Space Gamer: You had two hit games at GenCon — ***TOON*** and ***Paranoia***; it's interesting how similar they are. You're one of the few designers in the industry with a genuine "authorial voice." How do you do it?

Greg Costikyan: I think one of the things I'm noted for — which is certainly apparent in both ***TOON*** and ***Paranoia*** — is lending an element of humor to my games. In fact, all of my best-known games are humorous in approach, although certainly not *all* of my games — I've done games ranging the gamut of the adventure gaming spectrum and some of them are very different from others. One of the things, in fact, that disappoints me is that some of the games I consider more serious efforts are not as well-recognized as those which are more humorous.

SG: Specifically?

GC: Well, specifically, ***Trailblazer*** from Metagaming and ***Web & Starship*** from West End, neither of which did that well. But I certainly enjoy doing humorous games a lot and I intend to continue doing them. And not all my humorous games hit: ***Bug-Eyed Monsters*** perhaps was a bit too cheesy for some people.

SG: Even in the non-humorous games there is an identifiable personality at work, and that's not something we see often in the industry. Why do you think that's so?

GC: Well, perhaps part of it is that I have had more control over my games than most people do. Virtually all of the games I've designed I have also developed, so I've had a great deal of control over them, over the whole process of game design — from start to finish. Maybe the personality comes through stronger because there is one main personality involved. Also, I think I have an approach to game design which may be different from some other people's approaches. Still, there are other designers whose personalities come through in their games. As an example of a designer whose personality does come through I think of Kevin Zucker, who does historical wargames, mostly Napoleonic games. His games are invariably clean and well-balanced and generally fairly simple, but they have an overall historical atmosphere which I find very appealing.

SG: What do you mean when you say your approach to game design is different from other people's approaches?

GC: When I do a science fiction or fantasy game, I generally look for a particular genre or subgenre which exists within science fiction or fantasy, and then try to simulate that genre. Obviously, in ***Bug-Eyed Monsters***, I'm simulating a certain style of Fifties horror movies; in ***Creature That Ate Sheboygan***, I'm simulating Japanese monster movies; in ***Paranoia***, I'm simulating the whole dystopian genre of fiction starting with *1984* (and plenty of modern science fiction novels with the same kind of atmosphere as well).

SG: The question of atmosphere brings up the prevalence of atmosphere over mechanics in your two GenCon releases, ***TOON*** and ***Paranoia***. You've said that their game systems are essentially arbitrary. That's a pretty radical statement. What do you mean by "arbitrary"?

GC: What I mean is that the games could have been done with very different systems and I don't think it would have had that much impact on the success of the game, or the experience which the players undergo when playing the game. It seems to me that the most satisfying element of roleplaying is the identification with a particular type of character and the experience which results from that. In both ***TOON*** and ***Paranoia*** I was trying to induce a certain kind of experience for the players, and I think the game system used is pretty much irrelevant as long as it is capable of producing that. Both games could have been done as ***Basic Role-Playing***, Chaosium-style roleplaying games and I don't think there would have been that much change in the final product.

SG: Do you think this is what the gaming audience is looking for?

GC: I think atmosphere is a big part of what the gaming audience is looking for. I don't think the success of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** is due to the fact that its system is very good. I think it's due to the fact that it allowed people to participate in the fantasy experience in a way that no game had been able to before. I think if ***RuneQuest*** had been the first fantasy roleplaying game published it would have been as successful as ***D&D***.

Paranoia

SG: Let's continue with ***Paranoia*** for a moment. There's a long list of design credits for ***Paranoia***; who did what, exactly?

GC: Okay, a guy by the name of Dan Gelber — a local-area gamemaster — came up with the idea for the game about three years ago. He ran it without any kind of system other than a few sketchy notes, improvising as necessary on the spot. I played the game a couple of times, enjoyed it a lot, and thought the approach of a malevolent gamemaster

in a malevolent roleplaying universe was a very interesting one. And so I suggested to Dan and to Eric Goldberg that it might be worthwhile taking Dan's conception and turning it into a publishable game.

West End didn't really exist at that time, and we didn't really know who would wind up publishing the game, but we signed an agreement among the three of us and began work on it. I did the initial rules writing. Some of the fundamental system ideas are Dan's — the idea of a tree structure skill system is his — but they were basically raw conceptions. What I turned out was actually a pretty dry set of rules, and although there was some of the atmospheric material which is present in the current game, there was by no means enough, I think.

When West End signed the contract for the game, Eric brought in Ken Rolston. (Eric at the time was — and still is — head of R&D at West End.) He brought in Ken Rolston, who both Eric and I knew previously and for whose skills we had high regard, to do development of the game: to turn my fairly dry set of rules into, well, what is there; conduct playtesting; and so forth. I think to a very large degree Ken is owed the majority of credit for the success of the game because, as I said, what's important in the game is the atmosphere and Ken's writing is what brings out that atmosphere so very well. So, you know, in kind of a bizarre sense, I'm really little more than an intermediary. The game would not have been produced without my contribution, but the initial idea was Dan Gelber's and the final execution was Ken Rolston's.

SG: Has ***Paranoia*** achieved much success?

GC: It's hard to tell as of yet because the first boxed copies of the game were shipped about three weeks ago. Just based on the initial orders, it has been West End's most successful game, with the sole exception of ***Imperium Romanum***. So, yes, I think it's going to be pretty successful.

TOON

SG: The dedication in *TOON* is "For Jeff Dee, who thought he was kidding." What's the story behind that?

GC: Well, the situation with *TOON* is in some ways very similar to that with ***Paranoia***. Two or three years ago at Origins, Jeff Dee and some of the other Fantasy Games Unlimited people, some of the Chaosium people, and I were sitting around talking about roleplaying games, and we tried to identify a genre for which a roleplaying system had not yet been designed. We had various ideas, but Jeff Dee came up with the idea of doing a cartoon roleplaying game. And we all laughed at that, and we thought about the possibilities for a while — and we all agreed that it couldn't be done. So about a year later I was thinking about that conversation and I said, "Well, why can't it be done?" So I wrote up a set of rules.

The game was initially designed as a magazine article, and the intention was to keep the rules as short and as simple as possible. Warren [Spector, Editor-in-Chief at Steve Jackson Games] came across the game and thought that it might be successful as a stand-alone product. He was the one who rewrote the rules to bring out the atmosphere of the game — which again is the most important aspect of the game. So again I find myself more an intermediary than anything else. It wouldn't have been done without my contribution, but the initial idea was someone else's and the final execution was someone else's.

The Art of Game Design

SG: Well, that brings up the question of one of your very vocal opinions, about the idea that a game design is a work of art. How does that fit into this concept of collaboration, and the authorial voice we were talking about? Would you call *TOON* and ***Paranoia*** works of art?

GC: In a sense. I think one always has to be suspicious of those who claim to be artists because there are any number of people who pass nonsense off as art, but it's clear to me that game design is, like all other art forms, a creative endeavor which seeks to engage the emotions and intellects of the participants, and to transmit to them an understanding of reality incapable of mere verbal expression.

Certainly, on both *TOON* and ***Paranoia***, and on all games, there is more than one person participating in the creation of the final product, just as there are in any number of collaborative art forms — plays, movies, music. Even in a game which has a single designer who does most of the work from start to finish, you have the contributions of the art director, the playtesters (who invariably provide a great deal of influence), and cover artist. But I think that in general one should look at games as the creation of *someone*. There's something known as the "auteur theory" of film criticism which, in essence, analyzes films from the point of view that the director is the artist responsible for the production of the film — not denying by any means the contributions of the actors, the screenwriter, and so forth. I think that the situation of game designers is almost directly analogous.

SPI, TSR, and Greg Costikyan

SG: How about some personal background . . .

GC: I started playing games when I was thirteen or fourteen. ***Diplomacy*** was my first game — first adventure game, as it were. At that time, SPI in New York had open playtests — anyone could come in and play the games currently under development. I started hanging around there. My first job at SPI was as a scab: The backroom workers had tried to unionize. Dunnigan [James Dunnigan, President of SPI] fired the lot of them and hired a bunch of teenagers to do the work — on game credit; we weren't even paid money! I didn't have working papers, so it was all highly illegal, but what the hell . . .

SG: Greg Costikyan, Boy Scab!

GC: Yes. After a while, they started paying me money to assemble games. I keypunched and did playtest maps, and all sorts of odd jobs. Then Dunnigan gave me the opportunity to work on the design staff. My first game, ***Supercharge***, was done then, and I developed three or four other games before I went off to college. In college I continued to do games on a freelance basis — one or two a year. I ended up getting a degree in geophysics, which all relates to some degree, because I'm a science fiction fan. My primary interest was in the area of planetary geology — the geology of Mars and the Moon and so forth. Unfortunately, Exxon was not hiring exploration geologists for the asteroid belt. When I got out I had several options: I could have gone off to work for an oil company; I could have said "To hell with the degree" and gone to work for a publishing firm or something; but I decided to see if I could actually survive as a freelance game designer, and that's what I've been doing since then.

SG: Looking down your list of published credits, I don't see a lot of geophysical background in them . . .

GC: Well, it's hidden, but to some degree it's there. In ***Dark Emperor***, a game I have coming out from Avalon Hill this February, the map is an impact geography map. In other words, the geography was not formed by plate tectonics but by asteroid impact. It looks something like the Moon would look if you terraformed it. So there are bits and pieces of the geological background in various of my games.

SG: Let's get back to SPI. What was it like there?

GC: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . . SPI was a very exciting place to be. It was the place where a great many of the fundamental techniques of game design were developed and it was interesting being a part of it. SPI also had some fatal flaws: Jim Dunnigan, for example, who I think is one of the superb game designers, was also a terrible manager. SPI was something of a revolving door: People would be hired and fired on relatively short notice. In fact, it's kind of amazing that I managed to survive there as long as I did and wind up on good terms with almost everyone.

SG: How long were you there?

GC: I started working there in 1974. My first game was published in 1974. In late '77, when I went off to college, I stopped working for them but continued to do freelance games for them and worked closely with them until the company folded in '82. In 1982, after TSR had taken

over SPI, TSR told Redmond Simonsen and Brad Hessel at SPI that the magazines would continue to be produced from the New York offices. Since the SPI staff had at that point left to form Victory Games, they hired me as games editor for *Ares* and told me to report on Monday. I reported on Monday to discover that everyone in the New York office had been fired, and they were moving the magazines to Lake Geneva. So I was technically a TSR employee for about three seconds.

WEB & STARSHIP (West End Games); $18. Designed by Greg Costikyan. One 34" x 22" map, 320 counters, 24-page rulebook, two dice, counter tray, range-finder. Boxed. For two or three players; playing time one to five hours. Published 1984.

As far as I'm concerned, Greg Costikyan's name on a game box is as good as the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. Noted primarily as the designer of whimsical but endlessly playable games like ***The Creature That Ate Sheboygan, Bug-Eyed Monsters,*** and ***TOON***, Costikyan here turns his considerable talents to a more "serious" science-fiction premise with ***Web & Starship***. He's also attempted to fill a void in boardgaming by designing a game specifically for three players. (The two-player version is playable, but nowhere near as interesting.) With the inherent play balance problems, a viable three-player design is not as easy as it sounds, but Costikyan pulls it off in style.

The title of the game refers to the differing technologies of two of the conflicting civilizations. On one end of the map are the Gwynhyfarr, who have developed faster-than-light starships which give them unmatched mobility at the expense of limited troop transport. The Pereen race, on the other side, has developed a "web" which allows for instantaneous teleportation between worlds but requires the launching of slow and near-defenseless probes to locate new sites for expansion of the "web" system. Caught in the middle are the Terrans, who can draw on the technologies of both sides, but must develop them to a usable level first. Conflict inevitably arises as the races compete for settlements on neighboring stars.

Considering its scope, ***Web & Starship*** is remarkably smooth and easy to learn. Players can leisurely complete a conquest of the galaxy in a single session. The economic and combat systems are simple and clean. The movement system bypasses the usual grid pattern (inappropriate for three-dimensional space, anyway) and uses triangular calculation, which takes into account both vertical and horizontal planes to produce "true" distances. It's not as hard as it sounds — with detailed examples and plenty of tables, finding distances soon becomes second nature while simulating the feel of interstellar travel. Most important of all, the three-player concept is a winner. Each player has his own advantages, handicaps, and goals, and the ebb and flow of alliances makes for a truly unique gaming experience. Balance is surprisingly even (given that the Terrans are left alone long enough to get off the ground) and each side is fun to play. Components are top-quality, particularly the beautifully rendered game map, and a round of applause should go to West End for springing for large-size counters.

Considering Costikyan's previous efforts, I was a little disappointed at the lack of personality in ***Web & Starship***. In his Designer's Notes, Costikyan implies that he was trying to put some distance between this and his less "serious" games, but it's possible that he overcompensated. The races, for instance, are described as having vast differences in both physiology and psychology, but these differences have no bearing whatsoever on actual play. There are no leaders, heroes, or individuals of any kind — units are collections of numbers, just chess pieces. Star systems are differentiated only by settlement levels (a single number); there's no mention of how native terrain, ecology, or civilization would affect settlement efforts. The economic system is also too simplistic to add much flavor. Generally I found that I had plenty of money to do whatever I wanted; it seems that a galactic empire ought to be a little harder to manage. ***Web & Starship*** is one instance where an increase in complexity would genuinely translate into an increase in depth.

Costikyan's primary accomplishment with ***Web & Starship*** as a viable three-player design should not be underestimated. This is for the most part uncharted territory and, although a little cold and simple-minded for my taste, it's a milestone of sorts. Meanwhile, I'll content myself with a dream of a second edition of ***Web & Starship*** that includes the economic system from Costikyan's ***Trailblazer***, the characterization of ***Bug-Eyed Monsters***, and maybe even a monster or two from ***The Creature That Ate Sheboygan*** — now *that* would be a game I'd want on a desert island!

—Rick Swan

SG: What do you think actually happened to SPI?

GC: That can be answered any number of ways. From one point of view, what actually happened, I think, is that incompetent management drove the company into the ground over a period of years. After Dunnigan left the company they brought in Chris Wagner to try to rescue it. He made a valiant effort but wasn't able to do so; and certainly he made some mistakes as well. From another point of view, the story is an extremely sordid one. SPI was on its last legs and looking for someone to buy them out and take over the company. They approached Avalon Hill and thought they had an agreement, but that fell through. They approached TSR — at that point they just needed money to meet the payroll — and borrowed $25,000, signing a note which put all the assets of the company up as security for the loan. Three days after the loan had been made, TSR called in the note. Well, the implications of that are fairly clear . . . why TSR lent the money in the first place, and whether it had ever been a good faith loan . . . There are some other questions involved, like, there were any number of other creditors of SPI at that time, and I find it rather bizarre that TSR wound up with virtually all the assets of the company without challenge, but that's how things worked out.

SG: You said in your ***Web & Starship*** design notes that "TSR has the brains of a newt." Care to elaborate on that?

GC: Well, that was in reference to their continual use of "TM" after every mention of any name of any game. I think it's generally accepted that you need not do that — that if you say, for example, at the beginning of a document, "Such-and-so is a trademark of Whozis," there is no need to continue to put a little "TM" above each reference in the document. That really strikes me as rather anal-retentive on their part.

SG: Have you gotten into trouble with TSR?

GC: As far as I know, I haven't. That ["brains of a newt"] comment I suppose is arguably libelous, but I haven't heard anything from them about it. With any luck I won't. They may not even have noticed.

Other Game Companies

SG: You've had a lot of games published by quite a variety of companies. We've talked about SPI; let's go down the list of other companies you've worked with and find out what they're like. What has it been like working with Avalon Hill on ***Dark Emperor***?

GC: It's sort of peculiar. I have had very little contact with Avalon Hill about the game. I sent it to them; they sent me a letter saying they liked it, here's the contract; I signed the contract; they sent me a check. They had David Ritchie as an outside person redo the rules. They seemed all right. But in essence I haven't really worked with Avalon Hill at all, so it's kind of hard to tell you much about them.

Avalon Hill wants me to do a computer game, but I'm not certain I'll do it because Avalon Hill's distribution of computer games is not that great, and their royalities are not commensurate with those available elsewhere in the industry. They pay five percent royalties — that's the number they quoted to me; they may pay other people more. The [computer game] industry runs generally between eight and twelve percent. Avalon Hill's boardgame royalties are low, but not real low — their top rate is two and a half percent. Most companies pay three, and West End is the only company I know that pays five.

SG: What about West End?

GC: West End is a sort of godsend to me. You can get awfully stale if you spend five, six, seven days a week staring at a computer. And it's very pleasant for me to have a place to go where I can kind of swap ideas with people. It's a very productive relationship for me and, I hope, for them also.

SG: What exactly do you do for West End?

GC: In addition to the games I design for them, which are on a royalty basis, I work for them two days a week. I do all sorts of odd jobs (including game development work). I wrote their consumer catalog recently. I'm working on a 20,000-word style guide which will be about

(Continued on page 18)

Air screams around your ships as they enter the atmosphere. Missile-launchers fire deafeningly to port and starboard while atmosphere fighters drop in shrieking dives from their hangars below. Warriors, tightly clenching their weapons, check their pressure suits one last time and climb in grim silence into their landing shuttles. In the distance, five more heavy cruisers of your empire are raining destruction upon the planet below, their hulls gleaming coldly in the faint light of the white dwarf sun above.

This is not a drill. Already, negative-energy beams from the miles-wide guardian fortress below have turned the sky into a glacial nightmare of frozen air and fragmented metal as the cabin atmosphere of stricken ships solidifies instantly. Planes and shuttles twist and maneuver down towards a landscape rapidly becoming an inferno of flame and radiation.

This is no mere raid. For years, your people had explored, colonized, guided primitive races and dealt warily with godlike beings. Then you met the Vekkans. Possessing advanced technology, and fired by their dark religion to subjugate all life not like their own, they destroyed your ships and began enslaving your colonists. But you found their only staging base within twenty thousand light-years, and launched the greatest fleet your kind ever built to carry the war to your enemy. To fight for your very survival.

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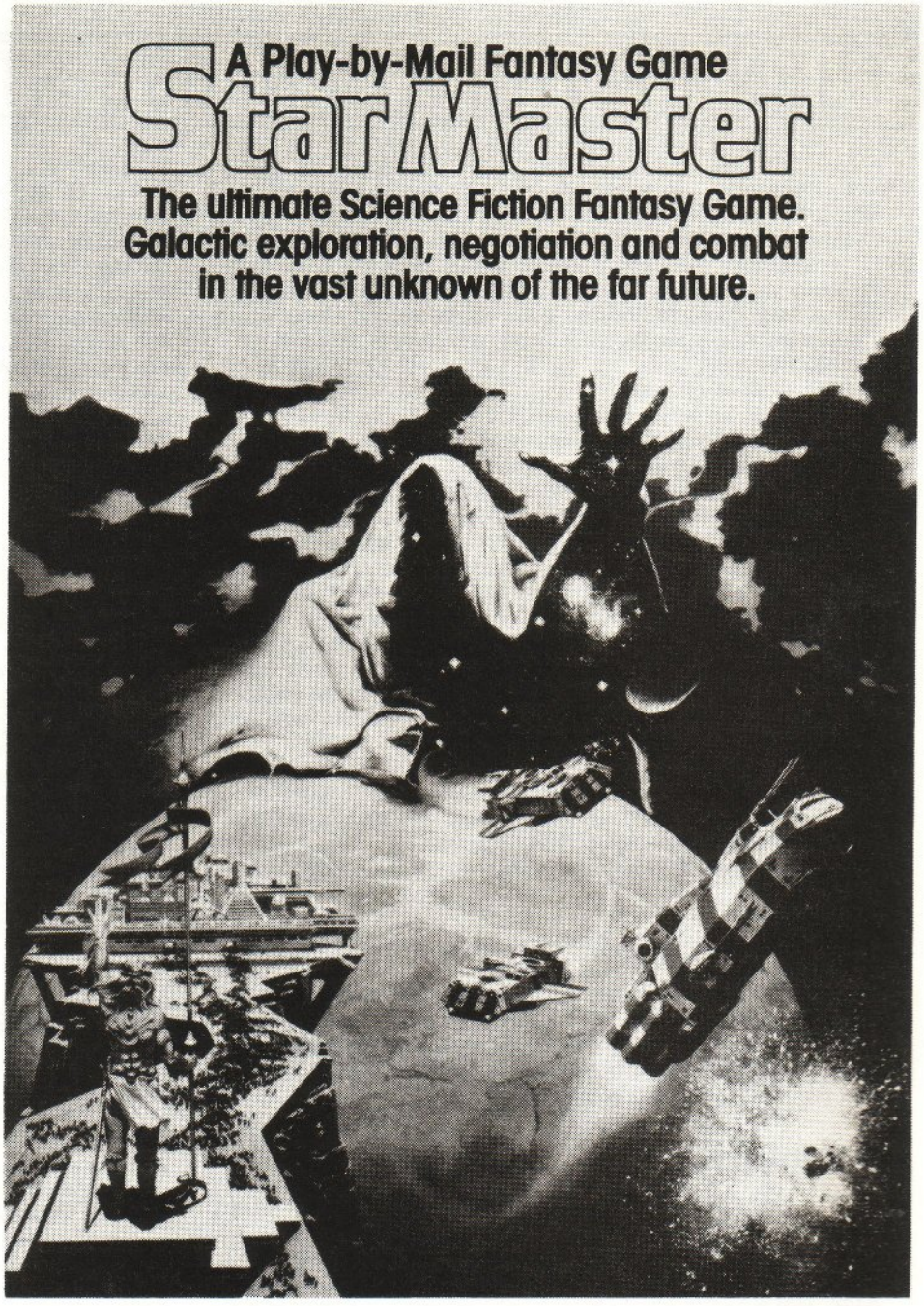

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YOU design your species as if you could have directed evolution to this moment.
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YOU choose your government and social order.
YOU custom-design your spacecraft, choosing armor, weapons, engines, and other features to make them as unique as your species.
YOU decide the production of the empire, building spacecraft, ground units, colonies, resource complexes and industry while satisfying the needs of an ever-growing technology and population.

StarMaster may be entered by purchasing the boxed version (with $20.00 in free turns!) now on sale in local hobby stores. If not available, write directly to KSK Concepts, Inc. Send $25.00 for boxed version (with $20.00 in free turns) or $5.00 to purchase the rulebook separately. (NJ residents add sales tax).

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how to write rules and the internal rules style that West End will be using in the future. But in essence I'm kind of a resident wizard: I have no authority but a fair amount of influence there.

In many ways, West End strikes me as very much like SPI in that there are a large number of intelligent people; there's a lot of stuff going on. I've hung around the Victory Games offices too, and I think very highly of the Victory people, but West End strikes me as more interesting and exciting.

SG: And Victory Games?

GC: I have had very good relations with Victory; they're very professional. They're very clear on what they're doing and in general I have a high opinion of their design capabilities.

SG: How about Metagaming, which published ***Trailblazer***?

GC: I was not entirely thrilled with my experience with Metagaming. The reason I did the game was because Thompson [Howard Thompson, President of Metagaming] offered me twice as much as SPI was then paying for a design. I was not real thrilled with it because I thought the set of rules I turned in was pretty solid. They were extensively revised [by Metagaming], and I think the final version suffered from poor organization and a fair number of ambiguities which were not present in my set of rules. I'm not at all thrilled with the graphic package, which is downright dowdy. And I wasn't too thrilled with the degree of promotion they put behind the game.

SG: Any others?

GC: Well, Steve Jackson Games is the only other company I've worked with, and I've had pretty good relations with Steve. I was very happy with what Warren did on ***Toon***, in general.

SG: Guess you'll know more when you get your first royalty check . . .

GC: Right.

SG: Have you given any thought to settling down with one company and giving up the freelance existence?

GC: Yeah, in 1982 or 1983 I interviewed with a whole bunch of electronic game companies and had job offers from, among others, Coleco and Atari, but both of them seemed to want me to do video games. I've been offered a full-time position at West End and it's possible that at some time in the future I'll take it.

Computers

SG: You've implied that you don't want to design video games, but now you're getting into computer game work. Tell us about that.

GC: I really want to do [computer] strategy games of various sorts. One of the games I think very highly of is Chris Crawford's ***Legionnaire***. That is a game which uses a certain video game technique — it's a time-dependent game, and sound is used very extensively to cue the player as to what's going on in the course of the game. But it is still very definitely a wargame and a strategy game. That doesn't mean that what I'm doing will be anything like that, but I'm more interested in strategy games than in video games.

SG: Tell us about your current computer projects.

GC: Well, I had a contract with Jim Baen to do a computer game based on the Flandry series [by Poul Anderson], but as it turns out my commitments at the moment are rather excessive, and I've been unable to get to work on that. Since he needs to get the game out in the next six or seven months, that contract has been cancelled, by mutual agreement. I may do some work for him again in the future. But that's pretty much the end of that at this point.

I do intend to do computer games in the future. If I expect ever to make any kind of money as a game designer it's pretty clear I will have to do computer games, which is fine because I enjoy programming.

Greg Costikyan, Editor

SG: What's the status of *FTL*, the magazine you were going to edit for West End?

GC: The deal we thought we had worked out with the publisher fell through, so that project is dead. All manuscripts have been returned. We paid on acceptance, so authors were at least paid for their stories. The idea, I thought, was fundamentally a good one, and we may try to revive it at some point in the future. I don't know if you're aware of it, but it was not to be a magazine; it was to be a series of trade paperbacks with games inserted, distributed to bookstores and so forth. We toyed with the idea of publishing the book ourselves, but given that West End is a new company and is still in the throes of understanding and coming to grips with the necessities of its own industry, we thought it was a bad idea to try to do something so startlingly different at this stage in the company's development. We may come back to that in a year or two.

The Future

SG: What are your current projects?

GC: I have three games coming out in February at the HIA show. ***Dark Emperor*** is done — the map is currently being executed by Avalon Hill and I imagine I'll have to proofread the galleys, but that's about it. It's a multi-player fantasy boardgame using a system derived from Simulation Canada's ***Jihad***. The second is a multi-player historical game — my first historical game since ***Supercharge*** — which will be published by Victory Games. It's called ***Pax Britannica,*** and it deals with the colonial era from 1880 to 1920, played by four to seven people. The third is a two-player *Star Trek* boardgame I'm doing for West End. It seems to be coming along fairly well, although it's still in the blue-sky stage at this point. This is what I'm spending most of my time on at the moment. Since my current conception may change very dramatically before I get it really underway, I'm not sure I want to talk about it.

The Freelancer's Life

SG: You're one of the few freelancers in the field who lives off his game work. What's the life of a freelancer like?

GC: Well, it's pretty grim, really. All of my games published prior to the collapse of SPI are now out of print, so I am earning no income from them. In the last couple of years I've essentially had to start from scratch again. I've been living solely off of advances and off of flat fee payments for services rendered to West End and to other companies.

One of the things which concerns me is the fact that it does seem virtually impossible to make the same kind of money as a freelancer that people make as employees. That strikes me as peculiar because a freelancer costs a company a lot less: They don't have to pay overhead; they don't have to pay Social Security contributions, health insurance, or anything of the sort. I would think it would be in their best interests to encourage the use of freelancers and freelance design, and to pay commensurately. But that's something which hasn't happened yet. It will be interesting to see if and when it does.

SG: Do you foresee remaining a freelance game designer?

GC: My monetary calculations show that when West End gets to the point where it can pretty much guarantee sales of five to 10 thousand copies of a game, it's cost-effective for me to work for them as a freelance designer. At the current stage, it is probably more cost-effective for me to work for them as an employee. The *Star Trek* contract is keeping me steady for the rest of the year, basically. After that time, I may take a full-time job with West End for a period of a year or two years, but eventually I do want to get back to freelance game design, even if I do do that.

The theory is that if I can do four games a year, eventually the royalty income will support me — not in great style, but it will support me. It will pay for food and rent.

SG: Is that what keeps you going?

GC: Yeah, partly that . . . I could make more money doing other things. I don't know what keeps me going, but I enjoy it. □

A Costikyan Bibliography
with comments by the designer

Designs

Supercharge*, 1975, SPI; folio-sized boardgame; Development: Frank Davis. This was a simulation of the battles of Alamein and Alam Halfa, and part of the *North Africa* quad. The quad as a whole was pretty bad; ***Supercharge* was *very* bad. Very little support was given me by SPI, and this 16-year-old novice designer was not up to it.

Swords & Sorcery*, 1978, SPI; full-size boardgame; Development: Eric Goldberg. I had a lot of fun doing this game, but it was a) too complicated and b) too sophomoric. I still think it is fundamentally fun to play, but the excessively silly humor gets in the way for too many people. As Eric Goldberg puts it, "*Swords & Sorcery*** is two teenagers having a lot of fun without adequate supervision." [Reviewed in *Space Gamer* 19.]

**The Creature that Ate Sheboygan*, 1978, SPI; capsule-sized boardgame; Development: Dave Werden. My most successful game to date, and a lot of fun to do; however, it is flawed. (For example, the combat system was designed with adjacent combat in mind, while most combat in the game is ranged, and the CRT deals inadequately with ranged combat.)

Vector 3*, 1978, SPI; capsule-sized boardgame; Development: Dave Werden. A clean, almost pristine design, ***Vector 3* had two major flaws. First, ships were represented by pencil marks on graph paper — a problem for some players — and the amount of paper provided was insufficient given the ranges of some ships. Second, the lack of terrain or "facing" rules makes movement and positioning irrelevant, so a game is nothing but a slugfest. [Reviewed in *SG* 29.]

**DeathMaze*, 1979, SPI; capsule-sized game with random geography. A successful attempt to do a simple solitaire "dungeon-crawling" game. What makes the game successful is the random dungeon geography system involving the use of chits. Redmond Simonsen, who came up with the system, deserves a great deal of credit. [Reviewed in *SG* 29.]

Barbarian Kings*, 1979, SPI; capsule-sized boardgame. A simultaneous-movement, multiplayer strategic fantasy game. Despite a colorless map and exceedingly dry rules (for which Redmond Simonsen deserves a great deal of blame), ***Barbarian Kings* was surprisingly successful. [Reviewed in *SG* 32.]

**Trailblazer*, 1981, Metagaming; capsule-sized boardgame. To my mind, an elegant game which successfully yet simply simulates the fundamentals of free-market microeconomics. In some ways, one of my best games to date, it has received little attention and was not a commercial success. [Reviewed in *SG* 50.]

Return of the Stainless Steel Rat*, 1981, SPI; full-sized solitaire boardgame. A solitaire paragraph-system game based on Harry Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat* series. ***SSR* has very colorful graphics, but, like most paragraph-system games, palls after two or three playings. From an artistic point of view, its most interesting feature is the "clue" system which randomly generates the identity of a villain and appropriate clues while hiding the villain's identity from the player.

Bug-Eyed Monsters, 1983, West End Games; folio-sized boardgame. The idea of doing a BEM game tickled my fancy, but not that of the public, apparently. Bad cover art didn't help, either. The system itself is plebeian, but the game is fun to play. [Reviewed in *SG* 68.]

Web & Starship, 1984, West End Games; full-sized boardgame; Development: Doug Kaufman. An attempt to do two things: a 3-player game which retains diplomatic elements, and a portrayal of two different competing systems of warfare. It is, in my opinion, a stylish hard-science game which provides clear strategic options to all players on every turn; another game I consider one of my best designs. [See the review on page 16.]

Paranoia, 1984, West End Games; roleplaying game; Co-Design: Dan Gelber and Eric Goldberg; Development: Ken Rolston. A macabre but humorous game of life in a viciously insane totalitarian society. The roleplaying equivalent of ***Diplomacy*** — i.e., a game which encourages back-stabbing and betrayal. The atmosphere is what makes it. [See the review on page 12.]

TOON, 1984, Steve Jackson Games; roleplaying game; Development: Warren Spector. Roleplaying the Saturday morning cartoons. I think the simplified skill system works very well; again, the atmosphere makes the game. [See the review on page 10.]

Development

Conquistador, 1976, SPI; full-sized boardgame; Design: Rich Berg. A one-to-five player game of American exploration in the 16th century. Berg worked extremely closely with me, which was very helpful; I learned a great deal about rules-writing and development from him in the process.

**Plot to Assassinate Hitler*, 1976, SPI; full-sized boardgame; Design: Jim Dunnigan, Co-Development: Fred Georgian. A terrible game, but one I am paradoxically proud of; I think I did a very good job with the rules. After reading the final draft, Dunnigan paid me one of the finest compliments I've ever received: "Pretty good for a high school kid" — which is about as complimentary as Jim gets.

Air War, 1977, SPI; full-sized boardgame; Design: Dave Isby. I knew nothing about modern air combat, but Terry Hardy (head of R&D at SPI) assigned me to this anyway. The game was a massive project, which Dave and I managed to bring off through sheer perseverance. I used to be very proud of the rules to this, but I reread them recently, and winced rather too frequently — I guess I've gotten better. For some bizarre reason, TSR has taken my name off both the box cover and the interior credits in its republished version — something which annoys the hell out of me.

BattleFleet: Mars*, 1977, SPI; two full-sized boardgames (strategic and tactical); Design: Redmond Simonsen and Brad Hessel. A game about which I was very enthusiastic during development. In retrospect, the tactical system has the same faults as ***Vector 3* (which was derived from it), but the strategic system still holds up. [Reviewed in *SG* 19.]

Drive on Stalingrad, 1978, SPI; monster game; Design: Brad Hessel. A flawed design, and flawed development; I think it's still fun to play, if ahistorical.

**Commando*, 1979, SPI; boardgame and roleplaying versions; Design: Eric Goldberg; Co-Development: John Butterfield. Though this won the H.G. Wells award for Best RPG in 1980, it isn't really a roleplaying game. Instead, it's a WWII/modern man-to-man tactical game, and quite good at that (credit to Eric Goldberg). Alas, SPI didn't push the game at all. My contribution was to add a lot of color — rules for camels, umbrellas, SCUBA gear, tanks, etc.

Armada* (2nd Edition), 1980, SPI; full-sized boardgame; Design: Sterling Hart; 1st Edition Development: Brent Nosworthy; Co-Development: Eric Goldberg. When I got the 1st Edition ***Armada* in the mail, I discovered that even I, who have no little experience in gaming, couldn't understand the rules. SPI had Eric and me rewrite the rules to make them intelligible.

**Sicily*, 1981, SPI; full-sized boardgame; Design: Dick Rustin. Part of SPI's "Western Front" series, Rustin's design is colorful and accurate, if slow-moving.

Killer Angels, 1984, West End Games; full-sized boardgame; Design: Holly Rubinstein and Dan Palter; Co-Development: Stefan Patejak and Doug Kaufman. A monstrously detailed and complicated game of Lee's Gettysburg campaign. It is what it set out to be — the definitive simulation of the subject. However, I don't want to look at anything from the Civil War for the rest of my life. Too much work.

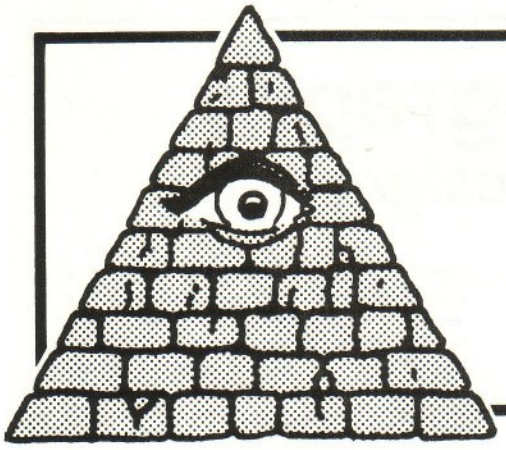
To Come

Dark Emperor, 1985, The Avalon Hill Game Company; full-sized boardgame; Development: Deborah Ritchie. A strategic game pitting a necromancer against civilized kingdoms. The system derives from that used in Stephen Newberg's ***Jihad***, a historical game of the Arab conquest of the east. Newberg back-printed the Christian units with Arab converts; I use the backs of the human units for undead.

Pax Britannica, 1985, Victory; monster game. As implied by the title, ***Pax*** is not a wargame, but a diplomatic and economic one; the Great Powers scramble for colonies. The game ends when the European Tensions Index exceeds 100 and a Great War breaks out. For four to seven players.

Star Trek: The Adventure Game, West End Games; Development: Doug Kaufman; folio-sized boardgame. The Federation and Klingons engage in peaceful competition for the space that lies between them, since war is prohibited by the Organians.

* = out of print.



ILLUMINATI®

It's very strange. ***Illuminati****, Steve Jackson's card game of conspiracy, subversion, and world conquest, has grown immensely popular since its publication in 1982. Sales are strong, nearly every gaming convention has its* ***Illuminati*** *tournament, and the game has become firmly ensconced in the annual* **Games** *magazine "Games 100" list — the editors' 100 favorite games.*

Even stranger, the success of the original promptly spawned two expansion sets, adding more groups that these scheming secret conspiracies could control. Now there's even a highly-acclaimed play-by-mail version, Adventure Systems' ***Illuminati PBM*** *(reviewed on page 27).*

Unbelievably, ***Illuminati Expansion Set 3*** *is being published in January 1985. Unlike its predecessors, it has* **no** *cards; instead, it adds a* **board** *to the original game, a "Propaganda Track" representing the world that the Illuminati so deviously manipulate. And there's* ***brainwashing,*** *which changes a group's alignment; and building up power and income; and new Illuminati; and more.*

Probably strangest of all, people keep sending us articles about ***Illuminati*** *— so many we finally had to do this special section.*

What's strange, of course, is that a game can become so popular and yet have such an outlandish premise. Secret conspiracies? Stealthy subversion? Hidden alliances out to dominate the world? Balderdash!

Incidentally, the swordfish is green and little Eunice cannot paint the small overstuffed chair. The word is "albatross." Paint the chair red. Immediately.

—The Editors

DEATH TO DEADHEADS!

by Terry H Jones

Much has been said about Steve Jackson's ***Illuminati,*** and all of what's said is positive. Many feel ***Illuminati*** is the finest thing since sliced bread, and believe me, I am not one to argue with the huzzahs and handclaps. I love the game, too, honestly, I love it . . . but . . . well . . .

If you obtain the first two expansion sets to the game you will have 96 cards: 81 groups and 15 Special cards. This gives the game variety, since different groups show up each time it's played, but the card mix also leads to less powerful, often less useful groups dominating the playing area, groups referred to locally as "deadheads." Deadheads are turned up, and then just lie there like short people in gym class: always the last ones picked.

How to eliminate these deadheads? I wondered. How to make the game full of nothing but useful, desirable groups, groups players would fight over? Why (like any good wargamer), by creating a *table,* a table that lists groups to be eliminated when you want to pare the game-world down to its essentials.

The following table outlines a system for culling the deadheads. It is divided into three sections, and how far down the list you go depends on how small a group pool you wish to play. Eliminating those in the first list reduces the world to 64 groups, axing those in the second brings it to 53, and removing those in the third section leaves you with 42.

Special cards are handled differently: Simply shuffle them separately, keep as many as are called for in the table, and then shuffle them back into the deck. Do not look at the Special cards, neither those to be used nor those discarded, since too much knowledge of these cards reduces bluffing.

General victory conditions remain the same: Acquire the required number of groups based on the number of players. Special victory conditions (listed for each step in the reduction) had to be modified to suit the smaller deck and different resource distribution. For instance, with the deadheads gone, the average amount of power in play goes up and the Bavarians have an easier time; but the Discordians are handicapped, since many of the groups dropped are decidedly Weird. (The UFOs, of course, are at home in any situation.)

A less playable, but rather odd, variant of this culling is to use *only* those groups listed in the tables. In this Deadhead Variant, resources are limited, and your Illuminati group's abilities are often all you have to work with. The timely play of a Special card can easily determine the victor. To play the Deadhead Variant, use 7 Special cards and all 39 deadheads. General victory conditions: acquire 7 groups in addition to your Illuminati group. Special victory conditions are listed below. Any number can play, but things really get bogged down with more than four players.

Finally, any Illuminated player knows there are groups unrepresented in the game — possibly (probably) the groups that are *really* controlling the world. The makers of ***Illuminati*** knew they'd missed a few, and added blank cards so that we, who know where the *true* power lies, can add those missing groups. I've devised several, but I leave you with my favorite, the *Banana Republics:* Power-2, Resistance-2, Income-2, Alignment-Special: this group has the alignment of the group which controls it. If control changes, so does the alignment; if the control group has several alignments, all are used. For example, if the Republicans control them, they're Conservative; if Fnord Motors gets them, they're Peaceful; and if the AADA takes them over, we're probably all in a lot of trouble. □

Table 1

Eliminate 17 groups, 3 Special cards
Total: 64 groups, 12 Special cards, 76-card deck

Eliminate:

- American Autoduel Association
- Antiwar Activists
- Boy Sprouts
- Eco-Guerrillas
- Flat Earthers
- Fred Birch Society
- Goldfish Fanciers
- Gun Lobby
- Hairdressers and Interior Decorators
- Intellectuals
- Libertarians
- Local Police Departments
- Morticians
- Parent Teacher Agglomeration
- Punk Rockers
- Society for Creative Anarchism
- Wargamers

Victory Conditions

Bavaria	Acquire 31 points additional Power
Gnomes	Acquire 170 MB
Network	Acquire 10 additional points transferable power
Assassins	Same as regular game
Discordians	Acquire 4 Weird groups
Cthulhu	Destroy 7 groups
Triangle	Same as regular game

Table 2

Eliminate 11 more groups, 2 more Special cards
Total: 53 groups, 10 Special cards, 63-card deck

Eliminate: All those in table 1, plus

- Cattle Mutilators
- Comic Books
- Fnord Motors
- Joggers
- KKK
- Moral Minority
- Nephews of God
- Psychiatrists
- Reformed Church of Satan
- Robot Sea Monsters
- Survivalists

Victory Conditions

Bavaria	Acquire 34 points additional Power
Gnomes	Acquire 180 MB
Network	Acquire 19 additional points transferable power
Assassins	Acquire 5 Violent groups
Discordians	Acquire 3 Weird groups
Cthulhu	Destroy 6 groups
Triangle	Same as regular game

Table 3

Eliminate 11 more groups, 2 more Special cards
Total: 42 groups, 8 Special cards, 50-card deck

Eliminate: All those in Tables 1 and 2, plus

- Anti-Nuclear Activists
- Convenience Stores
- Fiendish Fluoridators
- Health Food Stores
- Junk Mail
- L-4 Society
- Phone Phreaks
- SMOFS
- Trekkies
- United Nations
- Underground Newspapers

Victory Conditions

Bavaria	Acquire 41 points additional Power
Gnomes	Acquire 195 MB
Network	Acquire 14 additional points transferable power
Assassins	Acquire 7 Violent groups
Discordians	Acquire 3 Weird groups
Cthulhu	Destroy 5 groups
Triangle	Same as regular game

Table 4

Deadhead Variant Victory Conditions

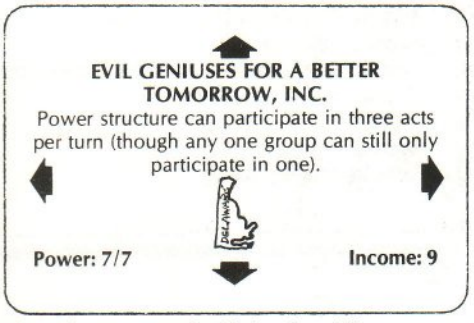
Bavaria	Acquire 8 additional points Power
Gnomes	Acquire 75 MB
Network	Acquire 2 additional points transferable power
Assassins	Acquire 5 Violent groups
Discordians	Same as regular game
Cthulhu	Destroy 5 groups
Triangle	Acquire 8 alignments (there are only 9 in the deck!)

THE EVIL GENIUSES ARE HERE!

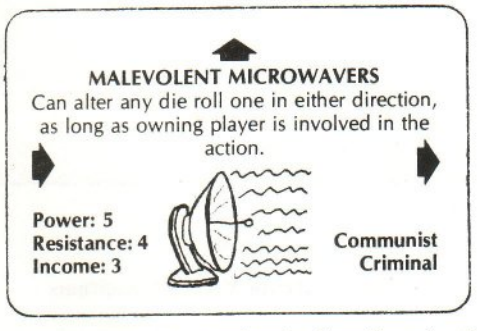
by L. Creede Lambard

Yes, you've heard rumors of their existence . . . half-caught whispers in dark, seldom-travelled pages of *Space Gamer* . . . letters from people who disappear, never to be heard from again. But until now, you had no proof they actually existed. Yet here they are: The Evil Geniuses For A Better Tomorrow, Inc. These brave men and women at the forefront of technology scoff at the notion that there may be things man was not meant to know. They laugh at the bleeding hearts who would restrict scientific research and put it under strict governmental control, who would cease research on genetic engineering and nuclear energy because they "might be dangerous."

To play the Evil Genius version of ***Illuminati,*** you will need the basic game and both Expansion Sets, including the two blank cards in ***Expansion Set 2*** (one Illuminati blank card and one controlled group). The blank Illuminati card represents the Evil Geniuses For A Better Tomorrow, a Delaware corporation, who have the following statistics:


EVIL GENIUSES FOR A BETTER TOMORROW, INC.
Power structure can participate in three acts per turn (though any one group can still only participate in one).
Power: 7/7
Income: 9

The blank card represents the Malevolent Microwavers, the people who beam microwaves into the US Embassy and, for all we know, into our homes.


MALEVOLENT MICROWAVERS
Can alter any die roll one in either direction, as long as owning player is involved in the action.
Power: 5
Resistance: 4
Income: 3
Communist
Criminal

Note that the Microwavers can alter the die roll one in either direction on *any* action *in which their owner participates.* ("Participation" is defined as being the attacker, defender, or spending MB to aid one or the other in an attack.) This means that if player A is attacking player B, player C cannot use the Microwavers unless he or she first contributes at least one megabuck to either attack or defense. (This special ability represents the confusion people experience when they are subjected to microwave bombardment.)

The Evil Geniuses win if they can take over *seven* Technological groups. Technological is *not* an alignment; one Tech group does not get a bonus of +4 to try to take over another. Rather, it is a list of the groups the Evil Geniuses use to achieve their nefarious ends. These groups are:

- Boy Sprouts
- Cattle Mutilators (experiments gone wrong)
- Clone Arrangers
- Comic Books
- Goldfish Fanciers
- Intellectuals
- L-4 Society
- Mad Scientists
- Malevolent Microwavers
- Nuclear Power Companies
- Orbital Mind Control Lasers
- The Phone Company
- Phone Phreaks
- Robot Sea Monsters
- Science Fiction Fans
- Secret Masters of Fandom
- Video Games

Note that there are only 17 Tech groups and the Evil Geniuses have to get seven to win (as opposed to there being 21 Weird groups and the Discordians needing five). This helps balance out the Evil Geniuses' incredible advantage of having three opportunities to act per turn.

The groups above represent not only the technological artificers themselves but also allies and dupes of the Evil Geniuses, including youth arms (Comic Books and Science Fiction Fans). In fact the only anomaly on the list is the Goldfish Fanciers. The only explanation I got when I called their corporate headquarters in Delaware was a cryptic, "Why . . . ah . . . well, Evil Geniuses *like* goldfish."

Enjoy this variant. *Or else!* □

MORE GROUPS ILLUMINATED!

by Russell Grant Collins

In *Space Gamer* 59, Steve Jackson turned six groups from ordinary into "illuminated" groups — groups that are behind it all. At the end of the article, he suggested that he'd like to see "some ingenious reader-illuminated power groups." That paved the way for this article, because I'm going to illuminate a couple more "regular" groups.

Keep in mind that illuminated groups have four outgoing arrows, no alignments, new Power and Income, and no Resistance.

The (Illuminated) IRS

Power: 7/7. Income: 4.

Special power: Once per turn may suck the money from *any* one non-Illuminati treasury (in its own power structure or another player's) to its Illuminati treasury. This counts as an action.

Special victory condition: Gain control of groups with a total Income of 30 or more (including its own).

The (Illuminated) Moral Minority

Power: 7/7. Income: 9.

Special power: +3 to control any Conservative group; immune to any attacks from Communist or Weird groups.

Special victory condition: Control five Conservative groups.

SSFTASS

This group isn't in any of the ***Illuminati*** games. It is mentioned in the works of Robert Anton Wilson that helped inspire the game, so I thought that it'd fit in the games as well. SSFTASS stands for the Secret Society For The Abolition of Secret Societies.

Power: 8/8. Income: 9.

Special power: For 5 MB may cancel any other Illuminati group's special ability for one turn. Does not count as an action, and *can* be done during another player's turn.

Special victory condition: Neutralize thirteen groups owned by other players. (Dropping your own groups doesn't count.)

I'd like to thank Rich Bandstra and the other Pella gamers for helping with this article. Happy Illuminating! □

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Illuminati is a game of conspiracy and paranoia. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is a British TV series concerned mainly with such things as dead parrots and musical mice. So it's safe to assume that no one will ever attempt to combine the two. Right? Wrong . . .

THE MONTY PYTHON *ILLUMINATI*

by Bill Cassel **Illustrated by Dan Willems**

THE BRITISH ILLUMINATI
+3 on *any attempt* to control Silly groups; cannot make or aid any attack to destroy; its groups cannot be destroyed

Power: 9/9 Income: 6

The British Illuminati

The Pythonated (British) Illuminati are taking over the world not for power, but for laughs. Therefore, they *cannot* be destroyed, even if they control no groups; and groups in their power structure are also immune to destruction! They cannot make or aid any attack to destroy (exception: they *can* play the "Killer Joke" special card). Their special victory condition is to control six Silly groups.

All Pythonated groups except the Colonel and The Piranha Brothers are of Silly alignment. Silly has no opposite alignment. Silly groups cannot make or aid any attack to destroy (except to play "Killer Joke").

Pythonated Groups

ARGUMENT CLINICS

Resistance: 5
Income: 2
Silly

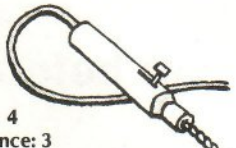
THE BISHOP

Power: 3
Resistance: 3
Income: 1
Criminal
Violent
Silly

BLANCMANGES

Power: 4
Resistance: 5
Income: 3
Communist
Silly

BRITISH DENTAL ASSOCIATION



Power: 4
Resistance: 3
Income: 3
Straight
Silly

BRUCES

Resistance: 6
Income: 3
Silly

CAMEL-SPOTTERS

Resistance: 2
Income: 3
Peaceful
Silly

CHURCH POLICE

Power: 3
Resistance: 4
Income: 0
Fanatic
Silly

FISH

Resistance: 2
Income: 0
Silly

FLYING SHEEP

Power: 0/1
Resistance: 2
Income: 1
Silly

D.P. & R.J. GUMBY

Resistance: 0
Income: 0

Silly

MR. EDWARD HEATH

Resistance: 3
Income: 1

Government
Conservative
Silly

HELL'S GRANNIES

Resistance: 6
Income: 3

Violent
Silly

KILLER CARS

Power: 3
Resistance: 5
Income: 0

Violent
Silly

LLAMAS

Power: 2
Resistance: 3
Income: 2

Peaceful
Silly

LUMBERJACKS

Power: 1
Resistance: 3
Income: 2

Weird
Silly

MICEMEN

Power: 0/2
Resistance: 3
Income: 1

Weird
Liberal
Silly

MINISTRY OF SILLY WALKS

Power: 5/2
Resistance: 4
Income: 2

Government
Straight
Silly

PANTOMIME HORSES

Resistance: 3
Income: 2

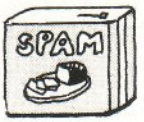
Silly

SOCIETY FOR PUTTING THINGS ON TOP OF OTHER THINGS

Power: 3
Resistance: 5
Income: 1

Silly

SPAM



Resistance: 0
Income: 4

Silly

THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Their attacks are automatically privileged. (*No one* expects the Spanish Inquisition!)

Power: 4/3
Resistance: 5
Income: 0

Fanatic
Silly

UPPER CLASS TWITS

Resistance: 1
Income: 4

Conservative
Silly

THE COLONEL

+3 on *any attempt* to destroy any Silly group

Power: 2
Resistance: 8
Income: 1

Conservative
Straight
Fanatic

THE PIRANHA BROTHERS

+1 on *any attempt* to destroy any group

Power: 4/2
Resistance: 6
Income: 5

Criminal
Violent

NOT BEING SEEN

May be played when any attack is announced. The target group of that attack is then "not being seen" and may not be attacked on that turn. The attacking group may make another attack instead.

Does not count as an action.

KILLER JOKE

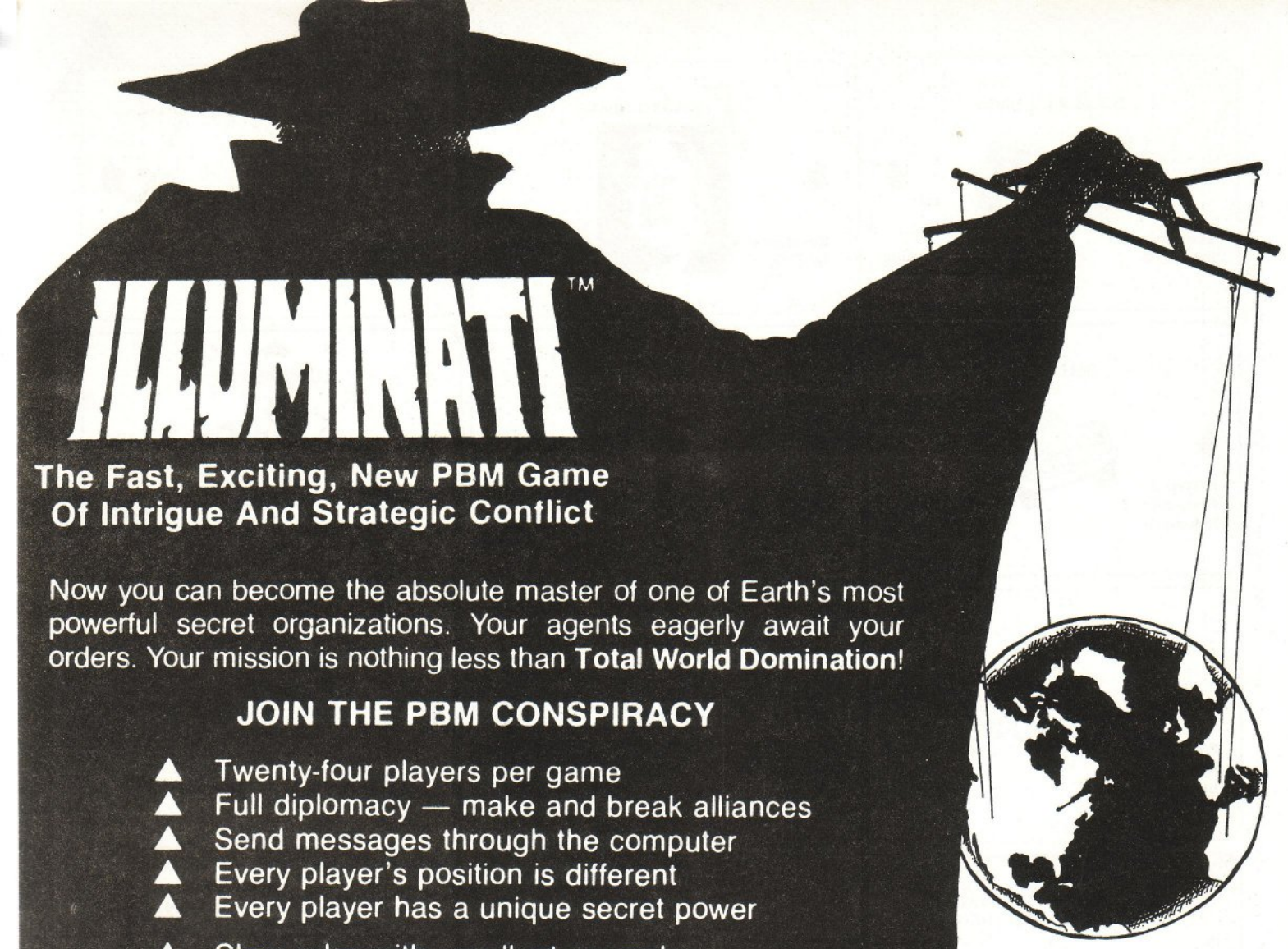
May be played on the owning player's turn, affecting any group of that player's choice of Power 0 or 1. That group immediately laughs itself to death and is considered destroyed. *Can* be played by a Silly group.

Counts as an action.

SELF-DEFENSE

May be played by any defending group in an attack. Adds 6 to attacker's die roll.

Does not count as an action.



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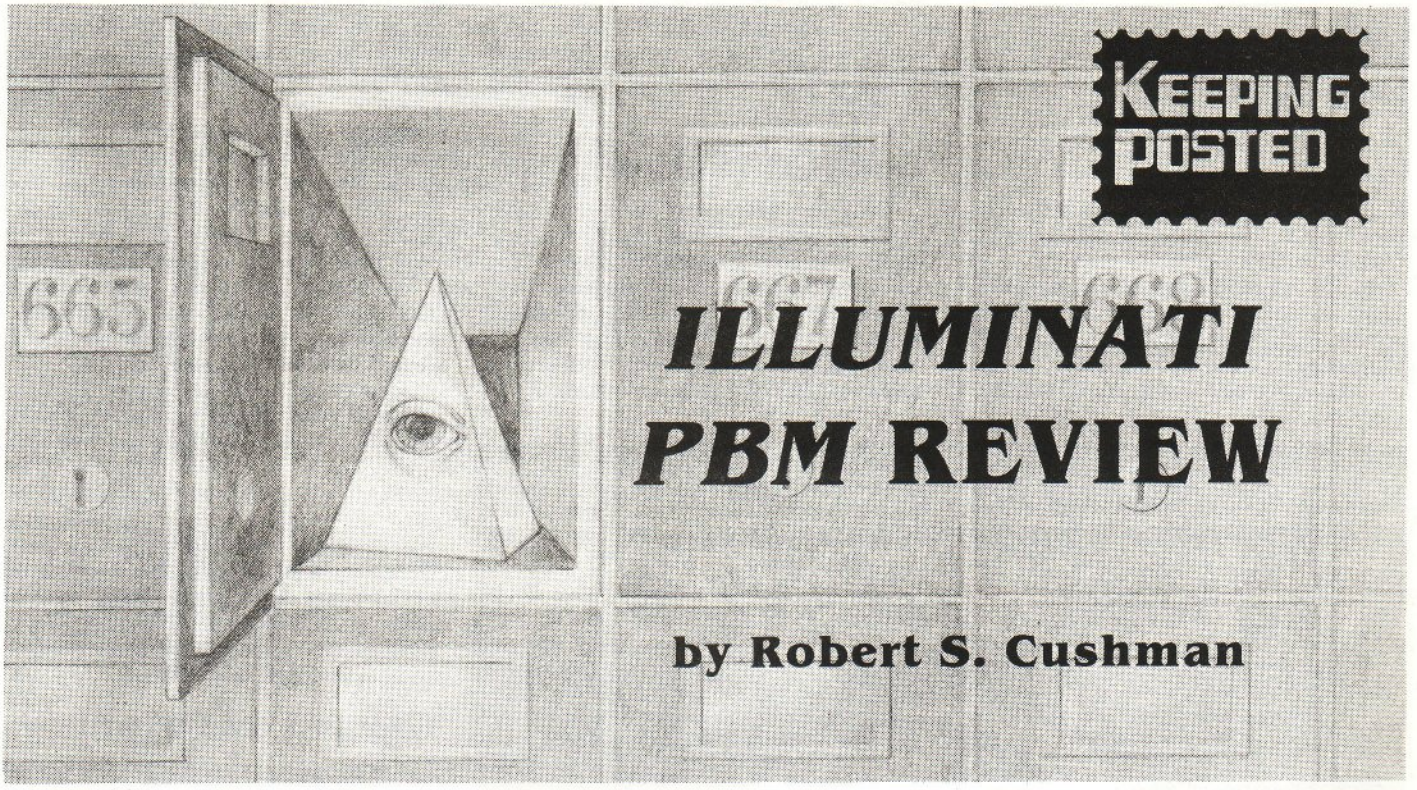


KEEPING POSTED

ILLUMINATI PBM REVIEW

by Robert S. Cushman

Adventure Systems has recently come out with a play-by-mail version of the Steve Jackson card game ***Illuminati***, making many changes that are needed for the PBM format. There are two kinds of people who might play this game: ***Illuminati*** card players and regular play-by-mailers. Personally, I am a PBMer, and started playing ***Illuminati*** when I came across Adventure Systems' rather enjoyable ad. Those of you who play the card game must first decide whether a PBM game is right for you at all.

PBM — Yes or No?

PBM games are expensive above all else. The four dollar cost of each turn of ***Illuminati*** can be only a part of the total. You will find yourself needing to make desperate phone calls to somebody who lives all the way across the continent. Often these conversations occur at night, which cuts the costs a bit, but they still jack up the price of a turn. Letters don't cost quite as much, but you'll find yourself going through a lot of stamps. You may also want the card game just to understand the basis of the PBM game.

PBM games have another problem: They can generate extremely long depressions. Like all games, PBM games have their ups and downs for every player; but when turns only arrive once a week, you may be convinced that you're losing for months at a time! Furthermore, it may take several tries at a game before you are really confident with it, and that process can take *years*. This accounts for the great numbers of beginners that drop out of any PBM game.

If you *are* ready to play games by mail, I highly recommend Adventure Systems. They are a small and relatively new company doing a fantastic job. They will process your turn as soon as it arrives and send it back that same day — which lets your turn spend five days in the mail and still gives once-a-week turnaround. Of course, that allows you only one day and night to fill out your turn sheet before you need to return it, which can conflict nicely with any plans you may have. This hectic pace is too much for some players, so Adventure Systems also runs a biweekly game, which gives you almost an entire week to scheme and plot.

A Brief Description

Illuminati is a game of world control through subversion and secrecy. Almost every conceivable group (human or otherwise) is represented in this game as a target for control by the 24 Illuminati, the world-wide conspiracies trying to control lesser groups through subversion and trickery. To win the game, your Illuminati must take control of 32 of the lesser groups. Although there are 280 groups, there are 24 players — so taking control of 32 is no easy feat. If you accomplish it, you are declared the winner, removed from the game, and given "master points." The other players then fight it out for second to fifth place.

When you sign up for a game, you are given a description of your Illuminati, its history, attributes, special powers, and some possible strategies that fit that particular Illuminati's powers. Those of you who expect the Illuminati in this game to have the same powers as they did in the card game are in for a few nasty shocks. For example, the Bermuda Triangle has a bonus to destroy other groups, while the Servants of Cthulhu have a bonus to corrupt.

The basic elements of any group are income, agents, power, influence, and a set of alignments (Fanatical, Secretive, Corrupt, Violent, Weird, Criminal, Radical, and Communist), each rated for intensity from 0 to 9. Income gives the group cash (in Megabucks) every turn, which the group needs to perform its actions. These Megabucks are most important, as almost no action can be performed without one Megabuck spent for each agent sent out. (That is, if you try to control another group with 100 MBs and 200 agents, it will be no different from sending out 100 agents with 1 MB each.) You will often have extra agents sitting around in a group, but as you lose other agents through attrition or through infiltration into other groups, you will need those reserves.

The agents of a group are divided into the *leaders* and the *cadre* of the conspiracy. You can increase the cadre of a group by recruiting new members (which unfortunately lets other groups infiltrate their own members into your group), and you can increase leaders by promoting cadre. If you think one of your own groups has had its security breached, you can *guard* the leaders and cadre of your group. A Guard action will purge the disloyal agents, which is extremely bad for morale. If possible, you should try to resubvert agents rather than purge them.

A group's power and influence measure the ability of your group to perform almost all of its actions; they can be increased only by dint of sheer effort. A group with low power will have difficulty taking over a group with high power, regardless of how much money it spends, and a group with a low influence will have trouble subverting people in another group. If you haven't subverted some of the members, or infiltrated anybody into the group, you won't be able to control it, no matter how powerful your group is. You can combine the power and influence of two different

groups by letting the group with a high influence do all the subverting, and then letting the powerful group try the actual control.

Finally, the alignments of a group determine how it will react to a move on the part of another group. You can change your own alignment very easily, and with enough money and power, you can change almost any *other* group's alignment without its permission! If you can imagine turning the Post Office into a violent and highly criminal organization, you will get a general idea of how to use alignment changes.

General Tactics

Once you take control of a group, you should immediately raise its secrecy and dedication, to protect it from other players. You should also let it build up a bit of reserve cash. This will give it a greater ability to fight off takeover attempts from other groups. You may even want to send it a little money from your Illuminati. Once you control the group, it will be very easy to subvert its members, and you should at least control all of its leaders. Another group's subversion affects the unsubverted leaders first, so somebody may be subverting leaders in your group without your knowledge. If you find that somebody is subverting your leaders (you will notice that you control fewer of the members than you used to), you can protect the group by quickly dispatching another Control order. If the group is taken from you while your turn is in the mail, it will be vulnerable to your recontrol order. You won't be wasting the money either, because if you haven't lost the group, the new Control order will be ignored.

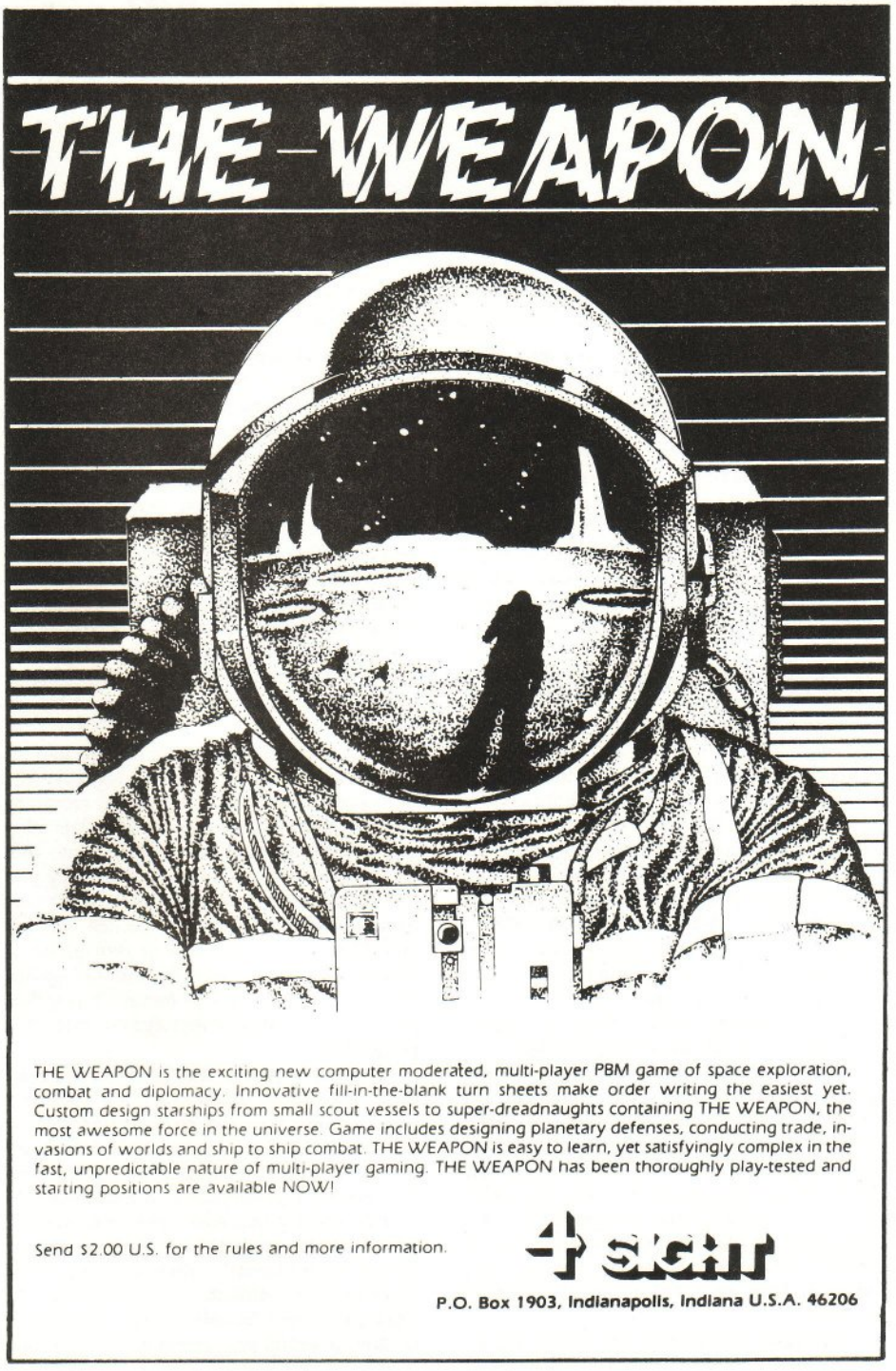
Most groups controlled by your Illuminati will be powerful enough to control groups of their own. Since your Illuminati can only directly control four other groups (as in the card game), and since the final goal of the game is to control 32 groups, your subgroups must eventually control groups of their own. Therefore, an attack against the subgroups of another player can be just as devastating as an attack against his or her Illuminati (this is unlike the card game, where an attack against the Illuminati itself is not allowed).

Looting and Probing

It is possible in this PBM game to loot the lesser groups, a tactic unheard of in the card game. It works this way: Once you control a group, order it to sell off all of its income, which will give it an extra large supply of cash. Then order it to transfer all its money to your Illuminati (or any other group). The receiving group in turn invests the new money to get income. You have, in effect, transferred the income of the first group into the second group, making the second group more powerful and the first group useless. Do this to weak groups and to groups you're afraid you'll lose next turn; you don't want to loot a group that has a high power and influence, because it can put the money to good use.

Once you have taken all the income from the lesser group, it becomes little more than a people bank. Subvert its members and order them to withdraw from that group and join yours. This gets rid of the problem of infiltration (which only happens when you recruit), and can be as cheap. If you have completely looted a group, you should probably drop it, so that other players looking at your power structure don't become alarmed. If you leave two of your own people in it, you shouldn't have any trouble retaking it at the end of the game, for a quick extra group to add to your tally.

Information gathering is a big part of ***Illuminati***. *Probes* will give you information on a group; the data may be slightly inaccurate and incomplete, since only a really powerful probe will be totally accurate. One of the last obtained and most important bits of information you'll get in a probe is who controls the group you are probing. A cheap way to learn if anyone else controls that group is to look at the morale. All neutral groups have a morale of 50, which drops when the group is taken over; if the group's morale is higher or lower than 50, you know at least that it *was* controlled at some time. (*Editor's Note: According to*



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*Draper Kauffman of Adventure Systems, this is not true of all **Illuminati** PBM games.)*

There are groups of players who've collected probe results of many of the 280 groups and are willing to sell or give them to you. These lists are valuable, in that they let you stop randomly guessing which groups makes the best takeover targets, and trying to compile one of these lists yourself is very hard. You will still want to probe a group before you attempt to take it, as you could anger its present owner.

Turns are processed once a week, meaning that your turn can arrive any time from Monday to Saturday. Because of this, you can send in a turn that will arrive on Saturday, and then a second turn that will arrive Monday, both of which will be processed. If your opponent is regularly sending in turns to arrive on Wednesdays, you will get in two quick turns before he or she has a chance to react. Of course, you have to send in the second turn without being able to see the results of the first turn, but it is often worth it. Adventure Systems thoughtfully provides you with an extra turn sheet at the beginning of the game to accomplish this. When using this move, it is helpful to write on the outside of the envelope that these two turns should be processed in the right order, just in case they both arrive on the same day.

A big question that a lot of players have with ***Illuminati*** is how much money and agents are needed to perform any particular action. All actions depend greatly on several factors, but the best way to find out the appropriate combination of men and Megabucks is to ask a more experienced ally. Briefly, an alignment change in your Illuminati usually takes only one agent and one Megabuck, while an attempt to subvert the members of another Illuminati can take more than 600 of each to be successful (and may still fail). Other actions range between those two extremes.

The Future of *Illuminati*

The ***Illuminati*** game I've been describing is only the ***beginner's*** game. Adventure Systems is planning to start an intermediate game soon with several rule changes. You are allowed to play in two beginner games before they consider you an intermediate conspirator, unless you win your first beginner's game. Intermediate games will have some new groups, with new powers. It will probably be harder to loot a group, so you will have to keep groups, regardless of how weak they are, if you want to use their cash. The special powers will play a much greater part in the intermediate game. (In the beginner's game, an Illuminati with a bonus to subvert has only a slightly better chance than any other Illuminati to subvert; in the intermediate, such a bonus would be far more important). In a sense, the beginner's game is only a training run for the intermediate game, to give players a general sense of how to play, before they are confronted with the realities of cutthroat ***Illuminati*** play. It is rumored that there will some day be an ***expert*** game, open only to those players who've collected master points. Who knows what lies in wait for us in that distant future . . .

I hope you have been convinced to play ***Illuminati***. For you card players, prepare to have your conspiracies expanded several-fold, and for you PBMers, get ready to enjoy a really novel game, with lots of amusing quirks. But be careful; group number 265 (PBM Game Companies) is out to take over the world. □

ILLUMINATI PBM DESIGNER'S NOTES

by Draper Kauffman

The strange thing about this game is that it didn't start out as ***Illuminati***. For almost a decade now, I've been keeping a notebook of ideas for a global strategy game which would get away from our preoccupation with games of maneuver warfare. After all, the world is full of politics, intrigue, propaganda, terrorism, and subversion, which respect neither distance nor borders, yet in nearly all of our games, we still concentrate primarily on the physical movement of pieces on a map! Yes, many games give important roles to diplomacy and economic development, but — from tribal fantasies to modern wargames to galactic conflicts — the game is almost always decided by which player can outmaneuver the rest on the battlefield.

In reality, however, great conflicts are settled by prowess on the battlefield only when the leaders on both sides have failed to outmaneuver each other in other ways. And I thought it would be interesting and fun to create a game which put the emphasis on those "other ways."

So, I began with the basic concept of a PBM game of world conflict carried out by spies and secret agents, saboteurs and assassins, propagandists and opinion makers, hot money and smuggled arms, popular movements and secret conspiracies. Attitudes, beliefs, security, morale, and persuasiveness would be just as important as raw power and wealth.

The units in the game would be countries, of course, plus international organizations (like IBM, OPEC, NATO, and the UN), government agencies (like the IRS or the KGB), and ideological movements (like Marxism, or Shiite Islam).

Figuring out ways to represent all of those groups and countries wasn't easy. The complexity was mind-boggling. Too much realism can be a trap for any designer, and I was clearly caught, looking for The Great Simplifying Assumption that would lead me to a workable solution.

The Illumination

At that moment, probably the *precise* moment of maximum frustration, our first copy of ***Illuminati*** arrived by mail. I read the rules, chortled over the cards, and talked Susan into "a game or two." The rest, as they say, is history. We played, we laughed, we played some more, we muttered imprecations, we recruited local gamers, we gave copies away to friends. As you may gather, we liked it.

Illuminati is an almost perfect example of elegant simplification. Everything about a group is reduced to a few highly abstract indices and alignments. It is tactically rich, playable, funny . . . and insidious! It wasn't long before I found that every problem in my own game design had a suspiciously similar solution: "Hey, how about if we just handle that like they did in ***Illuminati***?"

In fact, the fit between the PBM game and Steve's ***Illuminati*** was so good that it got embarrassing. Making the PBM game work was hard enough without the extra burden of making it different from the card game. I was starting to feel, well, just a little bit paranoid. Were the Secret Masters really trying to take over my game? Finally, I gave in to the inevitable and called Steve to see if he would be interested in licensing the PBM rights to us. By basely trading on past favors, I got him to agree, and development went very smoothly from that point on.

The Result

The original design had countries, leaders and cadre, and the idea of probing, infiltrating, subverting, and changing alignments. The key ideas incorporated from the card game were: 1) treating all countries and organizations simply as "groups," 2) using alignment scales to describe the effects of influence, and 3) the tongue-in-cheek conspiratorial background. The result, I think, is a much better game than it would have been if I had just started out to convert ***Illuminati*** to PBM.

Certainly the players seem to be enjoying themselves, which is the most important thing. During the original playtest period we were blessed with an exceptionally good group of playtesters who kept an eagle eye out for errors, while also contributing many, many suggestions for new actions, new special powers, and other changes, large and small, which have made the game more playable and more exciting.

In return, we've made a tremendous investment of both time and money in providing very fast, reliable service, and I think we've succeeded. Errors have been very rare, and most players get their turns back within five or six days unless they are pushing up against the one-turn-per-week limit. We've recently expanded our hardware capabilities so that we'll continue to be able to provide the same service as we grow. Happy conspiracies! □

Where We're Going
by Steve Jackson

Two years ago, in *SG* 60, I made a few predictions about the future of the gaming industry. And, fool that I was, I promised to run a scorecard in 1985 to see how good the guesses were. Well, it's 1985. So (not without a certain amount of trepidation) it's time for . . .

The Crystal Ball Scorecard

I made seven predictions. We'll take them one at a time.

1. "The biggest growth in the game field will be home computer games. Wargames will be a significant part of the computer game field, but nowhere near the majority. Home video-arcade machines will become comparatively *less* popular." 100% right. The only surprising thing has been the failure of the old-line wargame companies to move into the field in any significant way. Only AH has done so, and the results have been mixed. The best computer wargames are being produced by companies like MicroPro, SSI, and Atari.

2. "RPGs and adventures will continue to dominate the non-computer portion of the industry. TSR will continue to have higher sales than any other company, but their market share will diminish . . ." Right again. The superhero phenomenon injected new life into RPG-ing; both historical and science fiction boardgaming have languished.

3. "Minigames will increase in variety and availability. Inflation will fuel this trend. By 1985, there will be a lot of people buying $7.00 minigames instead of $20.00 'full-sized' games . . ." Pretty close. Inflation took the minis to $5.95 or $6.00, rather than $7.00 — and only Nova and FASA have joined SJ Games as significant minigame producers. But they're producing *lots* of them.

4. "Game companies will appear, die, and be bought out, as they always have. Figure on at least one new 'star' appearing every two years, and at least one big, solid-looking company going under (*a la* SPI) every two to three years . . . The yearly turnover will be 10% to 15%, but the total number of active game companies will remain about the same." Again, pretty close. Victory Games is our new star; Heritage and Metagaming our dead giants. And turnover has, indeed, remained pretty constant.

5. "Play-by-mail will continue to grow, as will play-by-phone. But for every correspondence game that survives, three more will crater after the first few months." Partially right. PBM *has* grown. There are now two full-blown magazines serving PBMers! But play-by-phone has gone almost nowhere.

6. "The game industry, as a whole, will prosper even though the economy may not. The national game conventions will continue to grow and to become more professional. Cooperation between convention organizers may lay the groundwork for a national gaming society . . . which will probably never have more than 20 to 30,000 members, but will be a great convenience to those who join." Well . . . maybe. The game industry has grown, but "prosper" might have been too strong a word. As for a national gaming society — it's to laugh. Maybe someday.

7. This was the *really* risky part. I named 28 companies, and made a prediction (general status only) for each one. And some people *still* aren't speaking to me over that. Rather than list each one, let's just look at the ones I missed, and a few of the borderline cases and interesting bullseyes. (If you want the whole list, go back to *SG* 60 and see for yourself.)

I called Nova to "hold position." They're doing much better than that. On the downside, I made the same prediction for Metagaming (which folded), Adventure Games (ditto), and Yaquinto (which has all but abandoned the field, cutting new releases down to almost zero).

I listed Hero, FASA, Sir-Tech, and Central Texas Computing as "small but growing," hedging my bets by saying they could do better if they played their cards right. Well, Hero and FASA are certainly top-ten material right now — Hero on creativity, and FASA on bucks. Sir-Tech hasn't done anything since ***Wizardry***, but they are still selling lots of supplements. And Central Texas Computing is still small (and still reliable) but not growing at all. So it goes.

Of the three that I listed as "need help," Heritage is indeed gone, Judges Guild is hanging on by its fingernails, and FGU is still FGU.

And "unclassifiable" Victory was the big success story of the year!

All in all, I had six clear misses out of 28. Could have been better. Could have been worse.

So, to total the scorecard — out of seven darts thrown, I'd call it two bullseyes, two solid hits, two in the second ring, and one (the last) out in the third. But none of them missed the board. Think I can do it again? I don't know either. I'll take a shot at it next issue.

GURPS Update

It's going pretty well. We had another go at the combat system. It still didn't work. But this time we figured out *why*. I think it's fixed. We're enmeshed in a philosophical argument about some details of the movement system. The "fine grid" crew is holed up in one corner of the office, the "large grid" gang is on the other side, and epithets are flying freely.

But I'm really feeling pretty good about it. We're now thinking about supplements. The basic set will concentrate on fantasy; the first three supplements, unless we get contrary feedback, will be superheroes, autoduelling, and science fiction. I hope *you* sent in the *GURPS* feedback in the last issue. If you didn't — do it now! There may still be time.

Other New Stuff

Illuminati Expansion Set 3, gameboard and all, has passed its playtests with flying colors. Look for it in early 1985. Also in early 1985 will be Scott Haring's ***Car Wars Expansion Set 7***, with off-road racing, combat, and healthful outdoor sports.

By popular demand (both from gamers and distributors) we are hammering out the details on a deluxe ***Car Wars*** boxed set. It will probably include most (if not all) of the material from ***Car Wars***, ***Truck Stop***, and ***Sunday Drivers***, plus a few other things here and there. We're stressing *completeness* and *organization*. Price is still unsettled.

Finally, one thing we *won't* be doing any longer is *Fire & Movement* magazine. As of January, it has been sold to DTI, Inc., of California. We all liked *F&M*, but it just didn't fit in with the rest of our projects. We wish DTI the best of luck. (Current subscriptions will continue uninterrupted.) As for us — now we've got still more time for science fiction and fantasy games! □

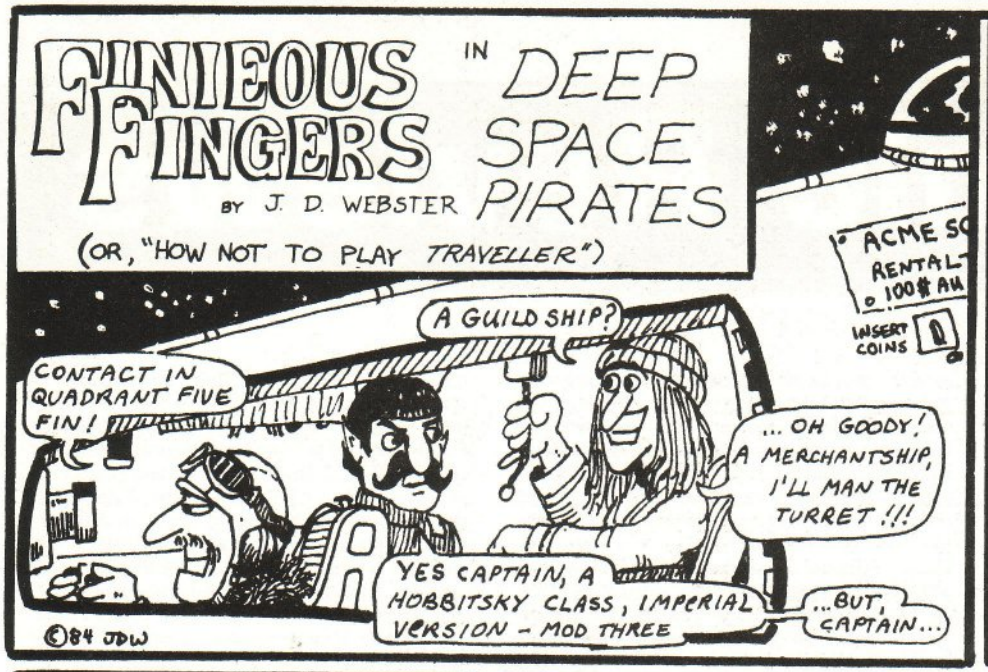
100,000th *Car Wars* Sold!

Flash! Theodore Schmidt of Lake Zurich, Illinois has purchased the 100,000th ***Car Wars*** game! Theodore writes: "I took off the plastic and opened [the pocket box]. I then pulled out the envelope [containing the prize certificate] and FREAKED OUT!!!" Congratulations, Theodore, we *love* freaking people out! Enjoy your lifetime subscriptions to *Space Gamer* and *Autoduel Quarterly*. *SG*, *ADQ*, and every game and play aid currently produced by Steve Jackson Games will be winging their way to you before you know it.

FINIEOUS FINGERS IN DEEP SPACE PIRATES

BY J. D. WEBSTER

(OR, "HOW NOT TO PLAY *TRAVELLER*")



OKAY, YOU FAT LITTLE MERCHANT, "FINGERS THE RED!", GREEDIEST SPACE PIRATE EVER CALLING! IDENTIFY YOURSELF!!
KADET
... HALLO? GUILD-SHIP "TEACUP" HERE...
GOOD! NOW SURRENDER OR ELSE!

... WHAT?, A HOBBITSKY CRUISER MOD THREE, GIVE IN TO A ... A MEASLY HUMAN SCOUT SHIP! HA! OH!, HA HA HA!!!
CRUISER!?! HEY FRED, WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A CRUISER?
FRONT
I WAS TRYING TO TELL YOU.... THE HOBBITSKY MOD THREE COMES IN TWO VERSIONS; A HELPLESS UNARMED MERCHANT AND A NEAR IDENTICAL FAST STRIKE CRUISER....
JANES SPACE

OH,... QUICK CHARLY, INPUTS?...
IT'S A BLUFF FIN, BLAST 'EM !!
... OF COURSE! HOBBITS ARE TOO STINGY TO SPEND MONEY ON STRIKE CRUISERS...
POWDER PUFF 1
BESIDES, NO ONE GIVES A FIGHTING SHIP A STUPID NAME LIKE ... "TEA CUP"... ICK!

A CRUISER EH?..., PERHAPS YOU WIMPS WANNA FIGHT TOO!!!...
... UH... OKAY BY US!
SO! BLUFFING TILL THE END... RIGHT!, EAT TWIN LASERS YOU HAIRFOOTS!!
VWAP!

TO BE CONTINUED!

Capsule Reviews

GAMES

AXIS & ALLIES (Milton Bradley; formerly published by Nova Games); $22 retail. Design credit not given. One 32-page 8½" x 11" rulebook, 33" x 19½" mounted mapboard, 299 plastic playing pieces (75 infantry men, 50 tanks, 50 fighter planes, 30 transport ships, 30 submarines, 15 bombers, 15 battleships, 12 anti-aircraft guns, 12 industrial complexes, 10 aircraft carriers), seven heavy cardstock-mounted charts, lots of cardboard and plastic poker-style chips, 12 six-sided dice, six styrofoam storage trays, and lots of paper money. For two to five players; playing time three to seven hours. Published 1984.

WOW! Make that double WOW! (WOW-WOW!) Milton Bradley's new Gamemaster boardgames are incredible. Imagine games halfway between ***Risk*** and the simple end of Avalon Hill's line and you'll have a pretty clear picture of what industry giant MB was after. And boy, have they delivered. ***Axis & Allies***, one of three games in the Gamemaster series, is a gem, a component freak's dream, the one game every gamer should run right out and buy today. You should have seen the lust in everyone's eyes the day it showed up at the SJ Games office! Even if you don't generally like historical board wargames, ***Axis & Allies*** is bound to set your heart pounding.

In ***Axis & Allies***, two to five players get together and recreate World War II. You can play the US, Great Britain, Russia (the Allies), Germany, or Japan (the Axis). No individual victory is possible in ***Axis & Allies*** — the Allies have to work together to achieve an overall goal; the Axis powers have to cooperate to achieve their unique victory conditions. Each country has an income (expressed in Industrial Production Certificates — "real" paper money included with the game) with which to buy weaponry of all sorts — plastic army guys! tiny tanks! little toy bombers! No cardboard counters in this game. (For a complete description of the units available see the component list above; repeating it here would take more space than the average capsule review.) Each turn, players buy weapons, move into and resolve combat, move pieces not involved in combat on a given turn, place units bought at the beginning of the turn, and collect income. Unit selection, and the use of those units in combat, are the keys to achieving victory. When combat is initiated (by having one of your units move into an enemy-occupied space on the map), all units in the contested space are moved to the "Battle Board" — a cardstock-mounted chart detailing in simple, graphic terms each unit's combat effectiveness. In order to score a hit, you simply roll your unit's attack (or defensive) strength or less on one die. When you hit, your opponent must remove one unit from play. Since all combat is considered simultaneous, however, destroyed units get a last shot before being removed. Combat ends when one or both sides are destroyed, or when the attacker chooses to retreat.

Axis & Allies has lots of good points. For one thing, I doubt there's *ever* been a game with more attractive graphics or components. One has to wonder if ***Axis & Allies*** would be half as appealing if it had little cardboard counters and a cardstock map instead of its glitzy, three-dimensional plastic pieces and heavy, mounted map. After the graphics, the most notable plus is the game's simplicity — the rules (printed in very big type) take up just a few pages of a short rulebook (the rest of the pages consist of examples, repetitions, clarifications, and white space). Virtually all of the rules — from set-up, to turn sequence, to unit cost and effectiveness — are reprinted on cards given to each player at the beginning of the game. Despite this simplicity, ***Axis & Allies*** players have to make some pretty sophisticated decisions — which units to buy, where and when to press attacks, how heavily to defend a given area . . . Complex decisions, yes; complex mechanics? No. You'd really have to look to the classic boardgames — ***Monopoly, Risk, Clue*** — to find simpler game systems.

But simplicity is a two-edged sword. Brevity gets in the way of clarity, and the rules are vague in spots. Players will find themselves making their own decisions about holes in the rules — holes which should have been plugged before the game hit the market. Nothing critical, mind you, but annoying nonetheless. Another problem: ***Axis & Allies*** plays *slowly*. Count on about half an hour per player and that's *after* you've all mastered the rules. (Luckily there's enough going on during other players' turns that nobody gets too bored. And on the plus side, munchies runs are no problem at all.) ***Axis & Allies*** has two component problems. The first is the map. Beautiful though it may be, the spaces on it are just too small to hold all the pieces you end up piling on the board; it's almost enough to make you wish for counters. The second component problem is the box: It's beautiful, sure, but it's huge — too big to fit comfortably anywhere in *my* house. And it's so deep the components rattle around and fall out of their handy containers the first time you list a little too far to port. The box could have been cut down to half-depth and done a much better job of holding everything in place. And, finally, it sort of bothers me that the game *never* seems to follow the course of history, but what the heck . . .

Overall, ***Axis & Allies*** is a winner. It's simple to learn, easy to play, requires lots of thought, and has immense replay value (since each country has unique goals, resources, and geography). Oh yeah, and it's a bargain. If any adventure/wargame company had released ***Axis & Allies***, it would probably sell for three times what it costs from Milton Bradley. As it is, it can be yours for a measly 15 bucks if you shop around. So what are you waiting for?

—Warren Spector

CONQUEST OF THE EMPIRE (Milton Bradley); $22 retail. No designer listed. Multi-player boardgame, part of MB's "Gamemaster" series. Full-color mounted mapboard, 268 plastic playing pieces, 45 plastic coins, reference card, control markers, two dice, 16-page 8½" x 11" rulebook, boxed. For two to six players; playing time four to five hours. Published 1984.

Everything has changed. That's what I thought when the three new Milton Bradley Gamemaster releases arrived in the mail. These are *wargames* — simple ones, about one step above ***Risk***, but nonetheless they're wargames from a *major* publisher. For anyone used to flimsy mapsheets and cardboard counters, the production values in these games beggar description. ***Conquest of the Empire***, an abstract multi-player game of Rome in 200 AD, gives you plastic *coins*, gold and silver "talents," to buy your infantry, cavalry, city fortifications, and catapults; all of these are detailed plastic miniatures! And the mapboard is just super-deluxe. As for the game itself, a rather ahistorical premise has up to six "Caesars" fighting for dominance of the Empire — and there's only one winner. Move your pieces (a province at a time), fight, collect tribute from your territories, and finally buy new pieces and place them in your home province. Combat involves calculating "advantages" gained with catapults and fortifications, then picking a unit on the opposing side and rolling one die to see if it's destroyed. Die-rolling alternates until one side is vanquished or the attacker retreats. Twice during the game the currency inflates, making everything more expensive. Galleys allow sea movement and combat.

This is a stupendous game. Despite its simplicity, ***Conquest*** requires elaborate planning, and rewards careful strategy. Every game is uniquely fascinating, whether a straight legion-to-legion war of attrition or a fencing match of deft and unexpected maneuvers. The inflation index, though simple, produces some neat effects: For instance, as you edge toward the next inflationary threshold, you become desperate to spend all available talents while they're still worth something. Also, inflation helps keep play balanced if one Caesar grabs lots of territory. All in all, an elegant touch, very true to the flavor of the game and the period.

How frustrating, then, to discover an atrocious imbalance in the combat system: the catapult (ballista). It gives you a combat advantage, which is fine — *but* it's also very hard to destroy, which makes it much too powerful. It's no exaggeration that winning ***Conquest*** depends entirely on how many catapults you can field; if you concentrate them, you get such an advantage you can roll through enemy forces three times your size. Very sloppy. Also, ***Conquest*** works best with five or six players, but that virtually ensures that at least one player will be knocked out of the game early on — always a flaw in a multi-player design. Little quarrels I had with this game: Defenders aren't allowed to retreat; Caesars ought to get combat advantages; the pieces, though really keen, are sometimes clumsy; and occasionally territories aren't big enough to accommodate all the pieces moving in.

But don't get me wrong: ***Conquest of the Empire*** is a superb contest of skill — not strong on simulation, but very good at capturing the grandeur that was Rome. It probably doesn't have *quite* the replay value of ***Axis & Allies***, another Milton Bradley Gamemaster release (*see the review elsewhere in this section*) — but it still gets high marks, and it sure beats the third MB product, ***Broadsides & Boarding Parties***. If you like the Roman period, or if you've just worn out your ***Risk*** set, ***Conquest of the Empire*** is highly recommended.

—Allen Varney

BROADSIDES & BOARDING PARTIES (Milton Bradley); $22 retail. Boardgame, part of Milton Bradley's "Gamemaster" series. Full-color 29" x 15½" mounted gameboard, two 15" high plastic ship models, two small ships, 66 plastic pieces, deck of 30 cards, two dice, 16-page 8½" x 11" rulebook, boxed. For two players; playing time 10-30 minutes. Published 1984.

Broadsides & Boarding Parties, clearly the least of the three new Milton Bradley Gamemaster wargames, has the *most* spectacular components of all . . . which is saying a lot! Along with the gorgeous mapboard and the little plastic sailors that crew your vessel, you get two *big* ships. I mean *really big*. Set them up at either end of the board, put ship tokens on the map to represent their position on the high seas, place captain, crew, and cannon on the decks, and you're ready for piracy in the 17th-century Caribbean. In moving the small ships from dot to dot on the map, players pre-plan maneuvers in sets of three, laying down cards representing "forward," "turn starboard," and such. The players simultaneously turn up the cards one at a time, executing the moves as the cards are turned. A ship within one dot of another may fire its cannons (depending on the relative position of the combatants); ships that collide move to the "boarding parties" phase, where the little plastic crewmen jump around on each other's ships, trying to kill the enemy captain. Combat between ships and between sailors is resolved by extremely elementary die-rolling.

Leaving aside those *enormous* ship models, the most respectable aspect of the game is its simple and fluid simultaneous movement system. Just lay the cards and turn them up; you have to think ahead, and there's suspense in waiting for the opponent's next move, so there seems to be little lost by using cards instead of the elaborate simultaneous movement procedures other naval games indulge in. Too bad printing nice slick cards is probably not cost-effective for any company smaller than Milton Bradley. Of course all the components get a solid A-plus, just as with the other Gamemaster releases (***Axis & Allies*** *and* ***Conquest of the Empire****; see reviews elsewhere in this section*).

But relative to its companion releases, ***Broadsides & Boarding Parties*** fails badly in play. The "broadside" phase works all right, as you try to soften up your opponent with cannon fire. It pales after a few playings, especially since the rules make no provision for wind (!) or more than two ships in a battle, but it's functional. The boarding phase, though, is really hampered by sophomoric movement rules and pallid combat procedures. Basically the only way to get the opponent's captain without risking your own is to gang up on him; but since both players get the same total amount of movement (to be split among their crews as they see fit), the other guy can give it all to his captain and race ahead, while you have to divide yours among the pursuing crewmen sulking along behind. It's all very frustrating. Even more so is the ludicrous fact that the ships are so big that, once assembled, they won't fit in the box!

Broadsides & Boarding Parties is not worth the money. The components can't save the weak design. It might be okay for helping two players kill 20 minutes while waiting to play ***Axis & Allies***, but otherwise there's not much value here. If you want big ships, buy a model kit; if you want sea battles, it's still hard to beat Avalon Hill's ***Wooden Ships & Iron Men***.

—Allen Varney

JUSTICE INC. (Hero Games); $15. By Aaron Allston, Steve Peterson, and Michael Stackpole; illustrated by Liz Danforth, Denis Loubet, Mark Williams, Mike Witherby, and others. Roleplaying game of 1920s and '30s pulp adventure. 96-page rulebook and 80-page Campaign Book plus three six-sided dice, boxed. For three or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

For fans of Doc Savage, the Avenger, the Spider, and the other crimefighting predecessors of comic-book superheroes, ***Justice Inc.*** adapts the "Hero System" to Depression-era pulp-magazine adventure. If you play ***Champions*** or ***Espionage!/ Danger International***, you'll recognize Hero's elaborate and endlessly versatile system here; in fact, ***Justice Inc.*** is virtually identical in mechanics to ***Espionage!*** Skill and equipment lists are altered; vehicle rules now include an abstract "Chase Movement" procedure for careening automobile chases (somewhat like ***James Bond 007***) and rules for airplane dogfights (remember *G-8 and His Battle Aces*?). There are new sections for psychic powers and "Weird Talents" (Lightning Calculator, Bump of Direction). The Campaign Book includes advice on running different styles of adventures: Westerns, detective mysteries, even occult horror and science fiction (though nothing here is likely to lure away ***Call of Cthulhu*** or ***Traveller*** buffs). Rounding out the second book are a timeline and slang dictionary to convey the "feel" of the era, an introductory solo adventure, and two full-scale scenarios (with notes for a third).

This is clearly the best-presented Hero product to date, with improved production values, a pleasant "user-friendly" style, and an absolutely sensational box cover by Brian K. Hamilton — one of the best I've seen for *any* game. The virtues of the Hero System need not be repeated; it's enough to say that it works as well here as it has in the other Hero releases. (For novices, the "Join the Club" solo is a painless introduction to the basic mechanics.) The

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HERO GAMES

chase movement is okay — it's not likely to figure in most adventures frequently enough that its abstraction will bother anybody. The "Coates Shambler" scenario is a top-notch murdery mystery and/or ghost story. I'll frankly admit that I haven't read the second adventure, "The Gray Scarecrow" — the first so impressed me that I want to "save" the second, to play in it myself!

The problems in ***Justice Inc.*** are principally in its presentation. For one thing, the kindest description of the typesetting is "erratic" (large gaps between words, lines not parallel, corrections pasted crookedly). Several of the numerous typos are not just sloppy but downright stupid — "see the chart on page 00," for example, where the editors forgot to go back and paste the proper page number over the "00." And the cover of the Campaign Book, by Mark Williams — never mind. Beyond matters of appearance, another amateurish move comes with the discussion of ghosts and Doc-Savage-style gadgets: The reader is simply referred to ***Champions***. Thanks a bunch.

But ***Justice Inc.*** is fundamentally solid work, and certainly adaptable to a *wide* spectrum of pulp-era melodramatics. If your players want lots of variety in one campaign, this is your game! I realize it's a close call, but I'd say that with this publication, Hero Games probably has the strongest roleplaying line on the market.

—Allen Varney

MEKTON (The R. Talsorian Company, P.O. Box 228, Aptos, CA 95001); $15. Designed and illustrated by Mike Pondsmith. Japanese-robot-style combat game with roleplaying elements. 32-page 8½" x 11" rulebook, 17½" x 21" color mapsheet, chart sheet, cardstock counter sheet, one six-sided die and one 20-sided die, boxed with styrofoam support insert. For two or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Mekton is among the first (and, I hope, the least) of what may soon become a battalion of RPGs based on the Japanese "robot-warrior" cartoons that have gained a large cult following among sf media fans. These stylized techno-fantasies showcase giant "robot" fighting machines, hundreds of feet high and armed with a variety of showy weaponry, usually lumbering through a standard space-opera plot; examples include *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Golion*. To the untrained eye (mine, at least) the films resemble updated Godzilla movies. But they've found a devoted audience, one that ***Mekton***'s makers may exploit with this shoddy job.

Despite ***Mekton***'s subtitle, "The Battlesuit Combat Game," this simple robot slugfest has no connection to SJ Games' ***Battlesuit***. What it really resembles, if you can believe it, is ***Car Wars***: Players roll a few combat-related attributes on 1d6, then construct their cybernetic fighting suits (their "Mektons") according to power requirements, "spaces" available for weaponry, and armor weight. All Mektons are humanoid — you choose a torso power plant, arm and leg modules, and a cockpit, and then outfit the whole contraption with weapons like missile racks, "cosmocannons," energy stars, drills, talons, and various beams. Options include sensors, rocket packs, and shields (not force shields — real *shields!*) that can parry attacks. Combat is simple: To hit, you roll less than your "MEK Skill" minus your opponent's skill (plus or minus modifiers) on 1d20; damage is a fixed amount inflicted by each type of weapon (and the armor is ablative, again like ***Car Wars***). There's a set of "Personal Combat" rules for fighting after you get out of the suit, but these are nearly useless (again, like ***Car Wars***). Movement is standard hex-grid stuff; the mapsheet shows the two island "empires" that are fighting a war using these big machines, the Elarans (good guys) and Kargan (bad). Given the listed scale of one mile per hex, each of these mighty industrial superpowers is about 25 miles from end to end — you could lose them both in Lake Michigan.

There's not much good to say about ***Mekton***, but it's a really spiffy presentation. The graphics are sharp; Mike Pondsmith's stylized drawings complement the text nicely; the rules are entertainingly written, and given as though told by the actual characters fighting the war. The appearance is deceptively sophisticated. I liked the touch about a character's Reputation level governing the level of equipment he or she is entrusted with. The map is colorful.

But. Where to start? Sketchy roleplaying mechanics (***Car Wars*** level, as I said). Inflexible Mekton construction rules — what if you want a really *powerful* laser, or a robot that transforms into something else, or less armor so you can move faster? You're out of luck. Simpleminded range mechanics — adjacent hexes are considered "hand-to-hand" range, for instance (though they're supposedly a mile across), while *no* weapon can fire beyond three hexes away. (In personal combat, you can't throw a grenade more than 12 feet.) Simplistic and unwieldy rules for "decimating" cities (destroying one hex of city takes three turns; how do you keep track of progressive destruction when you're moving around all the time?). Scenarios — well, there *are* no scenarios, only ideas for a few and some maps (a palace, a "citadel," a Mekton base). The rules talk about roleplaying scenarios outside the suits, but with personal combat as deadly (and luck-based) as it is, you'd be a sap to climb out of that cockpit. The text is shot through with typos. The map terrain isn't clearly identified. The cardstock counters are flimsy. The 20-sided die is insipidly small.

Mekton's packaging deserves special contempt. The 9" x 12" box, a papery, ramshackle affair, is given bulk and support by a half-inch-thick styrofoam insert — sort of the way concession-stand candy bars come in a cardboard sleeve to make them look bigger. Take out the styrofoam and that box will collapse if you stare hard at it; or leave it in, and think about the fifteen dollars you paid for one slender rulebook, a map, some charts, and that nice thick slab of foam.

I've spent this much time on ***Mekton*** only because its slick appearance and novel topic will sucker any Japanese-robot fan who can't wait for one of the other robot games due out soon. Pass the word.

—Allen Varney

TO CHALLENGE TOMORROW (Ragnarok Enterprises); $7.95. Designed by David F. Nalle. One 32-page, one 35-page and one 20-page 5½" x 8½" booklet, bagged. Published 1983.

Ragnarok Enterprises' ***To Challenge Tomorrow*** is one of those rare animals: a generic RPG that works surprisingly well. ***TCT*** is designed to allow GMs and players to roleplay in various historical eras, from the late 1400s to the far future of intergalactic empires, even including guidelines for running time travel and paratemporal campaigns. The game's three booklets cover, respectively, character generation and combat; background info and campaign guidelines on 10 historical or future eras (plus time travel), and appendices on vehicles, starships, aliens, robots, and androids, and time travel; and four short scenarios — two historical ("Fortune's Fools, 1485" and "Anarchy at Lugano, 1900"), and two SF ("The Man from the Island, 2050" and "Claim Jump, 2360"). Character generation is relatively simple: Four categories of three primary characteristics each cover physical, active, mental, and social attributes, with 1D10+20 attribute points per category to distribute between the three characteristics, plus 15+1D10 points to divide among any of the 12 attributes. Ten secondary characteristics are calculated from these; these are what are normally used in play. Characters also have a *very* wide range of skills from which to choose, with skill rolls based on various easily calculated formula. Combat is a bit more complex than merely making a simple skill roll, but generally is easily and satisfyingly handled.

For a relatively simple game, ***TCT*** has several interesting innovations. For example, Activity Points (a secondary characteristic, similar to Action Points in other games) may be added to a character's chance to hit (and avoid being hit); they can also be expended for particular actions. Armor both protects one from damage after being hit *and* helps protect from being hit in the first place — explained as deflection of the bullet or sword by the armor, a realistic compromise between the two usually-irreconcilable concepts. Skill lists are quite exhaustive, as are lists of weapons for use in the game's various eras — all noted with the year they first appeared, for historical accuracy. The "Worlds of Adventure" book is especially helpful in giving outlines of the various historical and potential future eras in which the game may be played, along with suggested sources where GMs may find more extensive info, scenario ideas, etc. — a necessarily brief but most useful synopsis of the game's "history."

TCT does have a few problems. I'm not thrilled about the way Training Points (i.e., experience points) handed out for play may be used to improve any skills, whether used in the adventure for which the points are awarded or not; I prefer the ***RuneQuest***-type skill improvement system. The rules on vehicles and starships are a bit too sketchy and really need fuller coverage than given here. And the two historical scenarios aren't the best examples of what can be done with this game, especially "Anarchy," which suffers from poorly reproduced maps. In fact, production is ***TCT***'s greatest problem — a case of a pretty good game in really poor packaging.

But if you can look beyond its production limitations, I think you'll find ***To Challenge Tomorrow*** a worthwhile purchase, even if for nothing else than several good gaming concepts. If all its promised era-specific supplement packs are as good, ***TCT*** could prove a surprise hit as the first workable generic RPG.

—William A. Barton

WARHAMMER — The Mass Combat Fantasy Role-Playing Game (Citadel Miniatures); $12.95. Designed by Bryan Ansell, Richard Halliwell, and Richard Priestly. Three 8" x 10" booklets; two sheets of play aids; one errata sheet. Boxed. Published 1983.

Warhammer is a set of miniatures rules for fantasy combat that allows players to create characters for roleplaying adventures, and use them in mass combat battles as well. The scale is 1 to 1, and as a result, the game systems are somewhat simplified to allow players to handle individuals in mass combat. Characters are rated for Bowskill, Weaponskill, Strength, Toughness, and Wounds, as well as the number of attacks they can make per turn and their initiative. There are die modifiers for weapon length, morale status, and weapon types, and advanced rules for critical hits and knockouts.

Unfortunately, most beginning level characters can only take one hit before they are killed, so it is difficult to run a campaign — the odds are that your character will die if he or she is involved in more than one combat per session. This points out the problem of design that hampers ***Warhammer***: It tries to be too many things. As a miniatures game, the rules are quite simple and highly playable, but when you try to use the simplistic system for roleplaying, it just is not equal to the task. For example, the magic system for ***Warhammer*** is good enough for the mass combat aspects of the game, but it is not really up to the requirements of an ongoing FRP

campaign. Wizards have energy points which they use to cast spells. Once used, the points are gone forever, and there is no way to regenerate them. While this does discourage wizards from using their powers indiscriminately, it lessens their role in a campaign, since most will tend to save their energy for the really big battles or quests.

The least satisfactory aspects of ***Warhammer*** are the character creation and roleplaying rules. Players choose from only three races for their characters — Humans, Dwarves, and Elves. They are also limited to being either Warriors or Wizards; there are no classes such as clerics, thieves, bards, etc. The list of skills that a character can choose from is limited, and worse yet, it is randomly generated! Your elf can end up with the useless skills of sailor and transvestite (yep, that's right, transvestite!) while lacking tracker, woodsman, and trapper skills — all of which one would assume an elf would want and have by virtue of birth. The biggest criticism is that the GM is expected to come up with his or her own ways of deciding how to remove traps, or what modifiers to use if a player attempts to accomplish a difficult task under pressure. As it stands, ***Warhammer***'s roleplaying rules are about equal to the primitive first-generation FRPGs.

Overall, I have to say that ***Warhammer*** is a good miniatures game, but a terrible roleplaying game. The system is flexible enough to be used as a mass combat module in most RPGs, but you have to decide whether it's worth $12.95 for a set of fantasy miniatures rules.

—Edwin J. Rotondaro

HEROES UNLIMITED (Palladium Books); $14.95. Designed by Kevin Siembieda. One 8½" x 11" 160-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Add to the growing list of superhero RPGs Palladium Books' extravaganza, ***Heroes Unlimited*** — a 160-page tome that adds superheroics, plus a number of other play options, to Palladium's roleplaying system. Basic character generation and most game mechanics in ***Heroes Unlimited*** are essentially the same as found in other Palladium RPGs, such as ***The Mechanoid Invasion*** and ***The Palladium Role-Playing Game***, with the addition of superpowers, psionics, bionics, customized robotics, and hardware galore. Characteristics are 3D6 based; to-hit rolls are made on a D20 with anything above a 5 a hit, provided the roll is above a target's Armor Rating (A.R.); damage comes first off of Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.) points before reducing hit points; and so on. However, a wide range of superabilities, skills, training programs, and equipment is available to the player in creating hero types from mutants, aliens, and psionics to cyborgs, robots, super-athletes, and super-detectives/spies. Super-power category, amount of background education for skill purposes, specific super-power, and other aspects are determined by random roll (or, optionally, by choice), but several other factors are completely at the discretion of the player — specific skills, psionic powers, bionic and robotic parts (within a randomly determined budget), training, and hardware (limited only by cash on hand). Additional sections help flesh out characters with basic alignments, personality quirks, phobias, and other aids to roleplaying. An adventure with several usable NPCs is also included.

Heroes Unlimited shines in several particulars, most notably its sections on Robotics, Bionics, Special Training, and Hardware — areas most superhero RPGs either ignore or gloss over by simply noting that powers can be designated as mechanically produced if the player desires. A truly robotic or bionic hero can be logically constructed with these rules (which could easily be adapted to any other superhero or straight SF RPG that uses 3D6 characteristics and D20/D100 rolls). And using the sections on Special Training and Hardware, these rules could even be converted into a non-superhero espionage RPG with only minor changes. Sections on Psionics and Aliens especially are nice, making these heroes stand out from the "ordinary" type of superbeing.

In fact, among the few problems I find in ***Heroes Unlimited*** (other than my own personal prejudice against games in which the *characters* go up in levels to improve skills) is that ordinary, earthly superhero types, such as mutants, seem almost *underpowered* versus the psionics, aliens, robots, etc. Characters whose power class is Mutant or Experimental or another that decrees they get a superpower (rather than psionics or hardware of some sort) get only that — *one* superpower (unless a mutant gets a freebie from a physical mutation). While some powers are diverse enough in nature that they actually encompass *several* powers (Flame power, for example, allows shooting fireballs, flight, and partial immunity to flame and heat attacks), others, such as Invulnerability or Flight, give those powers and nothing more. Also, magical heroes are omitted completely (no Zatannas or Dr. Stranges).

Still, if you desire hero-types like Batman, Captain America, Robotman, or Wolverine, ***Heroes Unlimited*** is a superbuy, even if you use it as nothing more than a sourcebook for an existing game.

—William A. Barton

STARSHIP DUEL I; STARSHIP DUEL II (FASA); $6 each. Designed by Jordan Weisman. Each game includes 2 Starship Navigation Wheels,

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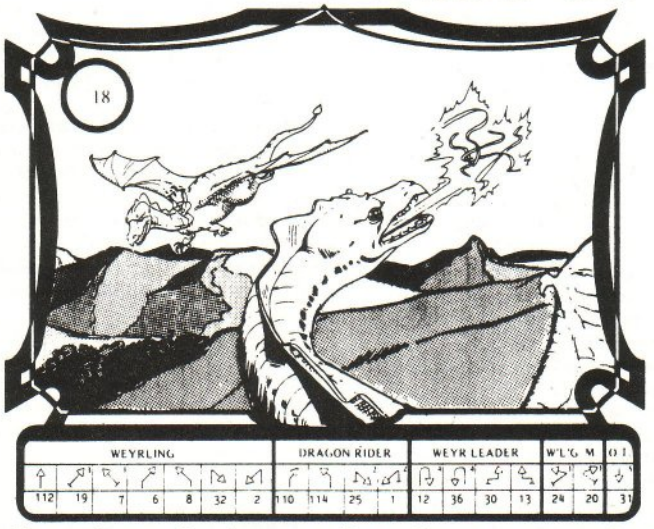

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3 Statistic Cards, 75 counters, 2 dice, and a 32-page rulebook. Published 1984.

These ***Starship Duels*** each pit a *Star Trek* Federation Ship against a Klingon vessel. Each player has a ship's statistics card where power units are allotted to shields and phasers. Any damage to the ship's superstructure is also recorded on the card. Navigation is the gem of these little games, and if you're tired of pushing cardboard counters around, you're going to love it. Each player has a three-tiered wheel that shows the relative position of both ships. The top wheel is the player's ship, the middle wheel is a single slit viewport, and the bottom wheel is the opponent's ship shown in a variety of views.

Each player secretly changes his or her ship's heading up to the number of allowed turns listed for the ship. Then, after announcing their maneuvers, the players move the wheel for the opponent's ship. A number then appears in a small hole that tells where to turn the viewport for the final heading of both ships. Then it's simply a matter of checking where phasers are aimed and rolling for hits and special damage. After three rounds of combat, players can re-allot their dwindling supply of power, trying to figure which shield may be needed and which phaser to power-up.

The games are great fun. The weakened *Enterprise* from *Star Trek III* and the Klingon *Bird of Prey* seem evenly matched. There are rules to cover fly-bys and disengaging. And there's a solo game where you try to shoot down a drone while it shoots at you. Surprisingly, it's not that easy to bring down.

My only complaints are that the wheels are sometimes hard to align, and it's awkward to spin one wheel while holding another in place. But you'll quickly get the hang of it, and so will any lucky soul you introduce to these addictive games. Needless to say, I strongly recommend them.

—Matthew J. Costello

DARK CULTS (Dark House); $7.95. Designed by Kenneth Rahman. One 8½" x 14" rulebook, one 8½" x 11" additional rules sheet, 108 playing cards. For one to four players; playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

A truly unique game has hit the market. ***Dark Cults*** uses no dice, no charts, no character generation system; it does use cards, but to call it a "card game" is to miss the point completely. ***Dark Cults*** is a "horror story game" unlike anything else you've ever seen. In its most common version, one of two players acts as "Life" and the other "Death." These two primal forces try to manipulate a constantly-evolving story through the play of various cards. There are Story cards (used to invoke particular moods), Character cards (which involve a story's protagonist in conflicts), Location cards (the settings of the story), Threat cards (which add suspense and get the protagonist into trouble), and a variety of other types. Playing a particular card limits the opposing side in the sorts of cards it can play in response. Players alternate laying down cards, with the Life player trying to keep a story's protagonist alive, and Death throwing all sorts of horrible events in the protagonist's path in an attempt to kill him or her off. Play continues until the protagonist dies or escapes to take part in another story. The cards provide the outline of a story; players are encouraged to embellish the game with more detailed descriptions — what the protagonist looks like, what he or she does for a living, why the events depicted on the cards are taking place, and so on — to add atmosphere to the story.

Dark Cults is as easy to learn as it is innovative. The rules are very short, and despite a lack of clarity in places, you can be up and playing in minutes. The cards, with artwork by someone called "Eymoth," are a magnificent nightmare. Each story card features a beautiful pen-and-ink rendition of a grim apparition, frightening location, or horrifying threat.

Dark Cults has only two real problems. The cards could be bigger and there should be more of them! It will take many games (stories?) before you run out of possible card combinations, but even so, the need for more cards is clear. Dark House should release expansion sets, similar to those for ***Illuminati*** and ***Cosmic Encounter***, providing more fiendish locations, situations, and threats — both human and otherwise.

Dark Cults gets the highest recommendation. It is quite addictive, and can be used as inspiration for horror RPG scenarios. (Players of ***Call of Cthulhu, Stalking the Night Fantastic,*** and ***Chill*** take note.) ***Dark Cults*** isn't going to be everyone's cup of tea, but if you're a budding writer, or a roleplayer who enjoys the roles as much as the playing, or if you're just a lover of ghost stories, ***Dark Cults*** may be what the doctor ordered. Just don't play it in the dark.

—Frederick Paul Kiesche III and Warren Spector

SUPPLEMENTS

TRAIL OF THE GOLD SPIKE (Hero Games); $6. Designed by Aaron Allston. Adventure for ***Justice, Inc.***. One 8½" x 11" 32-page book. For GM and several players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

A damsel in distress, a mysterious masked villain, a strange substance that turns men into zombies — basic ingredients for thrilling pulp adventure! All can be found in ***Trail of the Gold Spike***, Adventure #1 for Hero Games' '30s pulp RPG, ***Justice, Inc.*** Adventure, intrigue, and lots of two-fisted action are the hallmarks of this scenario (by former *SG* editor Aaron Allston), which follows squarely in the tradition of those serials of the '30s through early '50s. The adventure's subtitle, "Death Stalks the Lost Mine," gives a hint to its storyline, as adventurers pit their skills and daring against the evil Condor and his attempt to run the Whitleys — including the lovely Bethlehem — out of the family mining business. From New York City to Colorado, the player-characters battle with the Condor and his bizarre Pale-Faced Men in the air, on land, and below ground. But who is the Condor, and why is he trying to ruin the Whitleys? Stay tuned . . . ***Trail*** offers players a neat little mystery to solve, along with an action-filled plot. The GM is provided with all necessary background information to run the scenario, keyed by its availability to the characters, plus maps of the Whitley Mining Camp, main house and refinery, the Gold Spike II mine, and the lair of the nefarious Condor. Important NPCs — including prime suspects and potential victims — are described and outlined in ***Justice, Inc.*** game stats. And character conversions and guidelines are included to allow the adventure to be played with ***Call of Cthulhu, Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes,*** and FGU's ***Daredevils***, as well.

Trail of the Gold Spike is an excellently conceived and executed pulp adventure, with enough twists, turns, and red herrings to confound even the most astute of investigators (though I *did* guess the Condor's true identity early on). Enough options are included to cover most paths players will wish to explore in their investigations, both in New York, where the action begins, and in Colorado, where most takes place. The opportunity for aerial dogfights with the Condor's minions should please the WWI air buffs among your players. And the conversions for the other RPGs are a big plus, too.

Flaws are few in ***Trail***. Some features noted in the keys as appearing on the maps actually don't — electrical lines, most notably. And the values of similarly derived characteristics for the other systems covered — especially ***CoC*** and ***MSPE*** — are strangely dissimilar in the conversions. The open-ended nature of the adventure's conclusion might throw some novice GMs, but experienced refs should have no problems at all.

Trail of the Gold Spike is simply a lot of fun — to read, play, *or* GM. If you play any of the systems for which the adventure is designed, I heartily recommend it as the next exciting installment of your gaming career!

—William A. Barton

SWORDTHRUST (Mayfair); $6. Designed by Sam Shirley and Daniel Greenburg. Fantasy roleplaying module suitable for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and similar systems. One 40-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Gamers new to ***Dungeons & Dragons*** are often surprised to discover that TSR isn't the only company producing suitable roleplaying material. Mayfair is among the best of them, and their ***RoleAids*** series is certainly worth checking out by any ***Dungeons & Dragons*** fan. Unlike many so-called "universal" roleplaying modules, which can require extensive reworking before they're in a playable format, ***RoleAids*** modules have been designed with ***D&D*** specifically in mind. ***Swordthrust*** is a solid example: With a minimum of tinkering, it can be played smoothly on its own or can be dropped neatly into just about any ongoing campaign.

Swordthrust sends the adventurers on a quest to find the legendary Ice Titan hidden high in the snowy Chatar Mountains. The bulk of the adventure involves the exploration of a five-level "dungeon" which is actually the interior of the slumbering Titan's brain! While the Titan sleeps, the forces of good and evil (represented by the bird-like Fancies and lizard men called Durges) battle for domination of his mind. Other encounters are provided by the Titan's memories — physical manifestations of anything and everything the Titan has experienced in his lifetime. The adventurers can also search for hidden pieces of magic armor scattered throughout the Titan's mind (don't ask how they got there). With a setting as imaginative as this, just about anything is possible and for the most part, the designers rise to the occasion. The "memories" provide some of the most bizarre encounters you're ever likely to run across. (How does an intelligent slug with a solid gold brain grab you?) Knowing that literally anything can happen keeps player interest high.

Swordthrust could have been a classic . . . if just a little more effort had gone into a final polish. Given the nearly limitless possibilities of the premise, too many of the encounters are distressingly run-of-the-mill. (Why, for example, are there so many encounters with goblins?) The first half of the module rambles quite a bit; a good editor could have easily cut it in half. One more draft could have taken care of most of this.

All in all, though, ***Swordthrust*** is a very respectable effort. It's generally well-presented, original in approach, and quite playable. Those seeking an alternative to TSR-produced modules would do well to investigate ***RoleAids***, and ***Swordthrust*** is a good place to start.

—Rick Swan

DEADLY POWER (Mayfair); $6. Designed by Laurel Nicholson, John Keefe, and Donald Nicholson. Adventure module suitable for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** or similar systems. One 40-page rulebook. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Two factions are at odds in the mining town of Shallotville, and they're both after the same prize. The prize is a box of magic seeds which are rumored to give the possessor unbelievable power. The warrior Mynor Yelad wants to recruit your

party to retrieve the seeds, claiming they were intended for him by his father. However, current ruler Queen Enaj says otherwise; she wants you to bring the seeds to her so she can destroy them, and she swears that Mynor's intentions are thoroughly evil. Although the quest for the seeds is the heart of ***Deadly Power***, it's the sorting out of these allegiances that gives it a special flavor and depth.

Deadly Power is one of Mayfair's ***RoleAids*** modules intended for ***Dungeons & Dragons***; like the other modules in the ***RoleAids*** series, it's a quality effort both in execution and premise. The quest for the seeds requires four separate steps to complete, and even though each step is fairly involved, smooth play is insured by thorough descriptions and instructions for the GM. (For example, in encounters with key NPCs, specific options are provided for the GM depending on what actions the players take.) The uncertainty of exactly who's on your side and who isn't adds a nice edge to the proceedings. With a lot of action and hair-raising encounters (including a trip through Hell), it's unlikely that even the most jaded of roleplayers will lose interest with ***Deadly Powers***.

A more benevolent GM might want to defuse some of the harsher encounters before running the adventure. At one point, for instance, a character becomes permanently evil just for touching a harmless-looking staff; at another, the same thing happens just for trying on a helmet. The GM will also need to supply a fair amount of transitional information as it's often hard to tell exactly how the party is supposed to get from one location to the next. Better maps would have helped, and so would additional NPCs to guide adventurers who stray too far.

But these few rough spots are easily cleaned up with a little advance preparation. Overall, ***Deadly Power*** is a nice blend of puzzle solving and swordplay, intense from beginning to end. Recommended for the courageous.

—Rick Swan

SHIPWRECKER (Mayfair) $6. Designed by Sue Stone. Adventure module suitable for ***Dungeons and Dragons*** or similar system. One 32-page rulebook. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

Shipwrecker, a ***RoleAids*** module ready-made for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** players, finds the adventurers stranded in the seaport community of Wrighters Town, pondering the offer of King Nathan for the return of the lost Chalice of Storms. Of course, it's not as easy as it sounds. The Chalice is now in the all-but-inaccessible Pirate Caverns, which in turn are guarded by the hostile occupants of the *Goblin* Caverns. Needless to say, many have tried, but few have returned . . .

Anybody who thinks roleplaying is for kids ought to take a look at ***Shipwrecker***, as it's one of the most literately written modules I've ever come across. The detailed background notes read like a passage from a history text, and the NPC descriptions could be life stories of real people (real people, that is, who use magic rings and are part elf). Much thought has gone into the design and development of the community, right down to economic and administrative considerations. The cohesiveness and logic of the setting make for a very realistic feel; there's nothing superficial about ***Shipwrecker***.

It's this attention to detail that makes ***Shipwrecker*** somewhat disappointing as a game. So many pages are given over to background and setting explanations that there's not much room left over for the adventure itself. True, players could spend a lot of time exploring the city, but no real progress towards completing the mission can be made until they get to the Pirate Caverns, and that's halfway through the module. The trek through the caverns is also fairly dull; a lot of the encounters are run-of-the-mill (goblins, skeletons, human fighters) and many of the cavern areas are simply empty. Within the context of the storyline it all makes sense, but gamers looking for start-to-finish excitement are bound to be bored.

If designer Sue Stone had been given another 10 or 20 pages to flesh out the actual adventure portion of ***Shipwrecker***, this could have been about as good as they get. But even with its flaws, ***Shipwrecker*** is better than most. It's a solid example of good writing and intelligent presentation; would-be designers would do well to check it out.

—Rick Swan

EVIL RUINS (Mayfair); $6. Designed by Stephen T. Bourne and Martin F. King. Adventure module suitable for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** or similar system. One 32-page rulebook. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

In the introduction to ***Evil Ruins***, the designers state that the module is intended as an "intellectual challenge," but don't take that claim too seriously. For the most part, ***Evil Ruins*** is a straightforward search-the-dungeon adventure with a mystery grafted on to give the players some motivation. Somewhere within the ruins of a castle is the secret to the mysterious death of Ethelwaine, heir to the throne of Tintagel. If the players succeed in clearing things up, the Castle of Tintagel can be reclaimed as a religious retreat (with some reward treasure for the party thrown in for good measure).

The journey to the castle is enlivened by some interesting encounters with thieving squirrels, intelligent spiders, and a sleazy NPC whose help the adventurers need if they're to have any chance of finding their hidden destination. The castle itself has been demolished by sinister forces and what's left for the party to explore is a four-level underground dungeon. Care has been taken to insure that each succeeding level is more forboding than the one before; bedrooms and storage chambers soon give way to bat caves and torture chambers, effectively increasing the tension as the adventure progresses.

The main problem with ***Evil Ruins*** is that it's all too familiar. Inside the castle, there are no real surprises for experienced players, what with the usual monsters (zombies, orcs, ghouls) guarding the usual treasures (gold, weapons, magic items). Worse, the game comes to an awkward halt if the players don't stumble upon the correct artifact or NPC with the crucial clue that leads to the next encounter. Independent-minded players may be frustrated by the amount of nudging needed from the GM to keep them on the right path.

Still, ***Evil Ruins*** is a competent production and, in the ***RoleAids*** tradition, perfectly suited for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** fans. Nothing special, but entertaining in a modest way.

—Rick Swan

THE KEEP (Mayfair); $6. Designed by Daniel Greenburg, Samuel Shirley, Gregory Maples, and Anne Jaffe. Fantasy roleplaying module suitable for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and other systems. One 40-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

If you're unfamiliar with ***The Keep***, it's not for lack of opportunities. The original so-so novel has spawned a so-so movie, a so-so boardgame, and now a roleplaying module in the ***RoleAids*** series from Mayfair that continues the tradition. The extraordinary complexity of the storyline which spans eons of struggle against forces of evil makes playing ***The Keep*** an ordeal even for the most experienced GM and a near impossibility for the novice.

The designers do deserve credit for attempting to make things manageable. The adventure has been divided into three parts, all taking place in the same

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location but in different eras. The first part takes place in some unspecified ancient age, centering around a massive battle between the armies of Molasar (the bad guys) and the Order of the Dragon (the good guys). Part two jumps to the year 1476 as the investigation of the mysterious "Keep" continues, and the final section takes the adventurers to 1941 for a final confrontation involving, believe it or not, a horde of German Nazis. It's not often a fantasy roleplayer gets a chance to take on the Third Reich, and the uniqueness of the setting makes it a very satisfying encounter for players and GM alike. A special section is included to make it easy, complete with extensive statistics for Nazi weapons, equipment, and NPCs. In spite of the incongruity, the Nazis work surprisingly well; GMs unwilling to tackle the entirety of ***The Keep*** might consider lifting this section for use in another campaign.

As for working your way through ***The Keep*** as a whole, good luck. Assuming the GM is able to get a handle on the storyline (which will require several readings of the module along with a strong imagination to fill in the blanks), there are literally dozens of characters to keep track of through changes in identity, personality, and actions. For instance, in the major battle of part one, the GM must manipulate in detail nearly a dozen NPCs and an army of well over 100 fighters, magicians, and monks. It's an incredible headache for the GM; the designers themselves admit that this battle alone could take an entire day to play out. And even if you're up to the challenge, completing that day-long battle will barely get you through page ten.

Make no mistake — complexity doesn't always translate into depth, and ***The Keep*** is a struggle that doesn't pay off for either the players *or* the exhausted GM. With the exception of the Nazis, this is for die-hard "Keep" fans only. (There are some, aren't there?)

—Rick Swan

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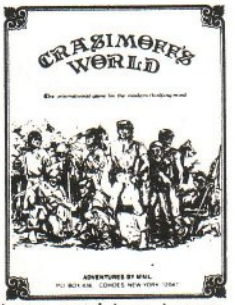
CRASIMOFF'S WORLD



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THE COMPLEAT ADVENTURER (Bard Games); $7.50. Designed by Stephen Michael Sechi. One 8½" x 11" 41-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

The Compleat Adventurer is a collection of heretofore unprofiled character classes for fantasy roleplaying games of any system. Enlarging on the Thief and Fighter classes, ***The Compleat Adventurer*** details the advantages, restrictions (generally concerning the types or armor and weapons usable by the class), and peculiar skills of the class in question: the Beastmaster, a Tarzan-like fellow with the ability to call and control the animals of the wilds; the Hunters (Scouts, Bounty-Hounters, and professional Witch-Hunters!); the Buccaneer and the Swordsman with their unorthodox combat styles, one nimble and the other smashing with brute force and dirty fighting; the Greco-Roman Gladiator, skilled in close combat and arena fighting; the mounted Knight, who may or may not be the chivalrous figure of popular mythology; the Martial Artist, presented with all of the many special attacks appropriate to the breed; and finally the straight Warrior, for those who want a Fighter with not much difference from the normal mold. For the Thieves: the unusual Harlequin, consummate actor and sleight-of-hand artist; the Spy, part mercenary, part assassin; and finally the Grey Mouser-like Rogue, streetwise con-man.

The character expansions in ***The Compleat Adventurer*** are useful, and much more intelligently thought out than those normally found in the pages of, say, *Dragon* magazine. Knights are not required to be champions of good, nor are Martial Artists in any way Monks (doing away with a popular misconception). The Harlequin is so unusual as to be good camouflage for a thief (or even magic-user), while the Spy is a welcome change from those stuck in the rut of Thief/Assassin. For sheer good adventuring in the vein of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, or if you want to play practically any character out of the ***Thieves' World*** series, the Rogue is *the* character class from ***The Compleat Adventurer.***

Unfortunately, ***The Compleat Adventurer*** has one big fault: Although it purports to be a "universal" supplement, most of its information and character formats are meant to be applied to ***D&D***. The spells, the abilities, the conspicuous alignment restrictions (the idea of alignment restricting what class a character may be applies to *very* few games, and primarily to ***D&D***): All point to ***D&D*** or a similar system.

The Compleat Adventurer is rather expensive for the information therein, though the thirteen character classes are quite good and very workable. With careful work, the classes might be worked into almost any system (though with some systems, the gamemaster would have to take the basic idea of the character class and fudge it from there).

—Craig Sheeley

THE COMPLEAT ALCHEMIST (Bard Games); $7.50. Designed by Steven Cordobano and Stephen Michael Sechi. One 8½" x 11" 45-page book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

The Compleat Alchemist takes an exhaustive look at an important but frequently ignored character class, the alchemist. For the most part, the alchemist is a fairly boring fellow, given the emphasis in most games on combat-related activity and dungeon delving. Furthermore, the most an alchemist can do in most games is make potions (and serve as buyer for the weird materials frequently found by adventurers). ***The Compleat Alchemist*** attempts to change this: Now alchemists can create minor potions at a low experience level, graduating to more effective potions, gadgets, devices, and other paraphernalia as they advance in experience.

The Compleat Alchemist details the business of being an alchemist, starting with a short essay on

what an alchemist *is*. A somewhat simplified creation process is at the head of every list of potions, gadgets, etc., telling how long it takes the alchemist to make whatever he's working on and how much equipment he needs. Each entry on the list (and there are about 6-10 entries per list, with 12 lists!) tells what materials are needed. Other lists profile equipment and ingredients, and inventory and work progress sheets are included to keep track of your projects. It's more complex than the average magic-item creation system, but the results are staggering: Over 100 items can be created, ranging from mild elixirs (love potions, minor healing, and the like) to creating living homonculi, iron "robot" golems, dragons, and Universal Solvent. The gamemaster is given a section in the back on how to integrate and referee alchemists.

The alchemist is a welcome departure from the typical hack-and-slash character, since he is an unskilled fighter; he must rely on his wits and his "technology" to get him through violent situations. It's not an exciting profession (most experience comes from doing experiments and not mangling other beings), and advancement is slow, but the rewards are awesome. A high-level alchemist can transmute lead into gold! And the system presented is complete enough to allow such incredible feats during game-play. Best of all, ***The Compleat Alchemist*** is truly "universal": It fits any game system.

The Compleat Alchemist may not be wholly original: Players of ***Chivalry and Sorcery*** may recognize some of the information (the notation about "TrueLead" caught my eye). This is a minor problem, though. The major problem is likely to be that most of the games and campaigns into which ***The Compleat Alchemist*** is supposed to fit have very little place for alchemists except as NPCs, which is a waste of the material presented herein.

The Compleat Alchemist is a worthy supplement, but if you don't think you'll ever have an alchemist player-character in your game, and you already have enough magical items and don't want to add any more, then this supplement is not for you.

—Craig Sheeley

THE COMPLEAT SPELL CASTER (Bard Games); $7.95. Designed by Stephan Sechi and Verni Taylor. 42-page book. For an indefinite number of players; playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

The Compleat Spell Caster is a supplement to the magic systems of most any fantasy roleplaying game. The book contains suggestions for converting the material presented to various game forms, as the information within is not designed for any one game system. New types of magic-using character classes, such as the witch and the necromancer, are presented, along with spells and information concerning the classes: a total of seven classes and over 200 spells. A section on summoned beings deals with demons and angelic "guardians," as well as plants (!) that can be summoned. A short section on the really powerful spells (which are not to be used by player-characters) and equally powerful magic items finishes the book.

The Compleat Spell Caster might be useful for a game system where the classes and spells of magic-users are limited, as it does include many new and different spells and classes to choose from. While many of the spells are already in the major game magic systems, a few are unduplicated, like "Negative Energy," "Soul Stone," and "Shape Change: Undead." Rune magic inscriptions like those presented here are also fairly rare in game circles, and quite useful.

Unfortunately, ***The Compleat Spell Caster*** won't much help people playing ***Chivalry and Sorcery***, and would only add confusion to ***AD&D***: These games already have quite complete magic systems. Only a game with a small magic system would benefit.

Quite frankly, $7.95 is too much to pay for this book. It's not worth the price.

—Craig Sheeley

SHADE OF THE SINKING PLAIN (North Pole Products); $10. Designed by Roger Walker. Adventure module for ***Rolemaster***. 8½" x 11" 56-page booklet, wraparound cover with map. Number of player and playing indefinite. Published 1984.

Recently, a huge metallic "battle barge" has been cruising the rivers of the local haunted swamp, looting and sinking galleys with fantastic precision. A dark figure, the Shade, with black emptiness in place of face and hands, commands the pirate vessel. This character has been variously "identified" as a velvet-clad magician, a wraith, and a demon's shadow. The players' job is a standard crush-kill-destroy mission to eliminate the battle barge, the Shade, its men, and the Shade's keep, and to make the waterways safe for humanity. ***Shade of the Sinking Plain*** contains brief descriptions of the three major cities in the region of the Plain, although only one (the starting city) is described in any detail. The module includes character sketches of some of the more important inhabitants, wandering monster tables with descriptions of the unusual critters — something ICE's ***Rolemaster*** modules lack — and some "new" spells drawn from North Pole Publications' ***Tome of Mighty Magic***.

Admittedly, there are a few delicious touches of irony in the module, which cannot be revealed without destroying the "surprises," and some clever

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player-traps which must remain similarly undisclosed. These well-thought-out sequences almost redeem the module, but do not quite succeed.

The problem is that ***SOSP*** is boring. There is very little innovative material in it, and this offers only slight relief from the tedium. The main part of the adventure is laid out in an index, and the players are often reduced to making a choice of two plans rather than choosing their own plans. The worst part of the module is the play option in which the players may lay siege to the Shade's keep. This option employs inadequate, oversimplified siege combat rules. A really good set of miniatures rules, such as ***Chainmail!*** by TSR, might be extremely interesting, due to the highly magical nature of the keep. Unless you have your own rules, however, don't attempt a siege.

Shade of the Sinking Plain sells for nearly as much as some RPGs cost, another weak point. Unless you are a hardcore hack-and-slasher, try the ICE ***Rolemaster*** modules instead, and don't waste your time and money.

—Jeff Ong

ORGANIZATION BOOK 1: THE CIRCLE AND M.E.T.E. (Hero Games); $6. Designed by Aaron Allston. One 8½" x 11" 32-page book. Supplement for ***Champions***. Published 1983.

Organization Book 1: The Circle and M.E.T.E. is the first in what is promised to be a series of play aids for Hero Games' popular superhero RPG, ***Champions***. Each book in the series is to outline various organizations with which superheroes may interact — and that a GM can use as scenario material to aid, hinder, or perplex player-characters. ***Book 1*** describes two such organizations: The Circle, a sort of occult "school" led by a mysterious Oriental mage known as The Master and attended by several N.Y. heroes; and The Metropolitan Extra-Terrestrial Enclave (M.E.T.E.), a refuge for friendly aliens trapped on Earth and a place where heroes with alien biologies might find medical aid not available at your local hospital. The descriptions of each organization include notes on its origin; a "personnel" roster of important characters and superheroes associated with each group, with ***Champions*** stats for most; maps and descriptions of the organizations' headquarters; two to three scenarios; and notes on campaign use of the organization. Scenarios for The Circle include a fairly well-developed vampire scenario, with maps and character stats, and two outlines for scenarios involving the past origins of two of its heroes, Aureole and Kor Hunter. The two M.E.T.E. scenarios are outlines involving two of the aliens currently residing at the enclave, left sketchy to allow maximum GM improvisation.

Both organizations covered in this book are well conceived and developed, offering a wide variety of opportunities for interaction with ***Champions*** player-characters. Several of the NPC heroes or aliens are intriguing characters in themselves and could easily be dropped into a campaign as helpers to the heroes — or as villains for them to fight under different circumstances. Especially interesting and suitable for such purposes is "Case 39" in the M.E.T.E. section — a blob-like alien that figures prominently in the M.E.T.E. scenario outline "The Hatchling."

I really find little to fault in this book. I would prefer to have seen character stats for The Master, The Circle's powerful leader, rather than having his stats left for the GM to generate. (Unexpected situations tend to creep up on GMs a lot, especially in comicbook-oriented gaming, and a set of ready stats could come in handy in a pinch.) Ditto for most of M.E.T.E.'s staff. And I wish this book fell under Hero Games' agreement with Chaosium to include ***Superworld*** stats for the characters.

If the succeeding books in the ***Organization*** series are as good as this one, Hero Games should have some winners on its hands.

—William A. Barton

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THE RUINS OF CHICAGO (Timeline); $7. Designed by Bill Worzel. Adventure for ***The Morrow Project***. One 8½" x 11" 39-page book and 11" x 17" GM map/screen. For Project Director and up to eight players; playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

Ever wonder what the Windy City would be like 150 years after WWIII? A group of Morrow Project personnel get the chance to find out in ***The Ruins of Chicago***, Timeline's fourth scenario pack for ***The Morrow Project***. Morrow Recon Team G-12C find themselves awakened from an unexpected 150-year sleep, not by a signal from Morrow Prime Base as expected, but from Damocles — a US super-defense computer first encounted in the ***TMP*** scenario ***Project Damocles***, and again in ***Operation Lucifer***. Damocles, now working with several Morrow teams, has awakened the group for a mission that is to take them through the ruins of Chicago to establish a link-up between Damocles and an advanced computer system located at Northwestern University in Evanston, which may still be intact. Armed and equipped for riot and crowd control (the team's original mission) with a single Commando Ranger vehicle mounted with one .50 calibre machine gun, the player-characters must make their way through what is left of Chicago, facing possible opposition from the remnants of civilization clinging to life in the ruins. This may come in the form of The Machine (the city's political body), various Clans, or the mysterious personnel of "Fort Morrow," a group operating out of what was once O'Hare airport. The module includes maps and descriptions of important areas in and around Chicago, including the University; biographies and character stats of the important NPCs of the Machine, the Clans, the University, and Fort Morrow; internal plans and expanded hit tables for the Commando Ranger; notes on improvised traps and weapons; and several new weapons for the game system, including the M14 rifle and homemade crossbows, hand slings, and blowguns used by the survivors of Chicago.

Chicago is a nice change of pace from past ***TMP*** scenarios in several ways, the most obvious being its setting in what's left of a major city rather than in and around small towns (in an ironic twist, the MIRV that was to finish off Chicago missed and hit Lake Geneva instead, leaving a lot more than radioactive slag for the team to traverse). A table of typical encounters found in Chicago's ruins is a nice addition to help the PD keep things moving. And this scenario offers many more opportunities than previous modules for diplomacy and negotiation with the various competing groups in the city.

This last point, however, could lead to trouble for inexperienced ***Morrow Project*** players. With an inexperienced team leader, especially, the potential for rich interaction with the various NPCs could be thwarted and the scenario turned into a bloodbath, leaving the player-characters mired in a no-win guerrilla war amidst the ruins. If not careful, too, the players could find themselves the losers in a most disheartening encounter with the personnel of Fort Morrow. As noted on the cover, this can truly be "An Extraordinar[il]y Deadly Scenario for ***The Morrow Project***" and is less suitable for novices than previous offerings.

Overall, however, for a team of veteran ***TMP*** players, ***The Ruins of Chicago*** can prove a most challenging and worthwhile roleplaying experience.

—William A. Barton

BEYOND THE WALL OF TEARS (Blade/Flying Buffalo); $7.95. Designed by K. Martin Aul. Solo adventure for ***Tunnels & Trolls***. One 8½" x 11" 52-page book. For one player; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Over a year since its last solo adventure, Blade has produced ***Beyond The Wall of Tears***. In this adventure, your character's little sister has been kidnapped by evil creatures. You must "dream-walk" into a strange world to rescue her, facing the most frightening denizens of your nightmares. In the end, you may succeed in reuniting your family and finding rare treasures, or die a failure.

The theme of entering into one's dreams permits a broad range of possibilities. The monsters vary greatly in description and character. The magic system variant is good, even though many of the spell pitfalls are puns on spell names. Your weapons are reduced to the ones supplied in the scenario, testing your character and not his super-sword. The most significant feature in this solo is the introduction of a scenario balance system. Most ***T&T*** solos can be low-level-character killers and high-level-character playgrounds. In this solo, the balance system makes the scenario a challenge for most characters of any level.

A major loophole in this solo is that if a character has an attribute of certain values, it is much easier to make saving rolls on that characteristic. Large attribute values make for difficult saving throws. The graphics and style of this adventure are also problems. All drawings are up to Blade's standards, but the gender and the handedness of the hero vary throughout. This solo has a short path, many longer courses, and a few automatic death tracks. The length of the short path does not make the game worth the price.

This scenario is not the best or the worst that Blade has produced. Players with mid-level characters will like this scenario because they'll have an easy time making saving rolls. Gamemasters could

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use this solo for killing off high-attribute mega-characters. ***Beyond the Wall of Tears*** makes a good, but not excellent, addition to your ***Tunnels & Trolls*** solo collection.

—Philip L. Wing

OPERATION LUCIFER (Timeline); $7. Designed by D. Patrick Beckfield and H.N. Voss. Adventure for ***The Morrow Project***. One 8½" x 11" 36-page book, 11" x 17" GM map/screen. For Project Director and six players; playing time variable. Published 1983.

Operation Lucifer is Timeline's third published adventure for its ***The Morrow Project*** after-the-holocaust RPG. It is, in a way, a sequel to ***Project Damocles***, Timeline's last ***TMP*** scenario pack. While involving a different Morrow team, and taking place in Wisconsin rather than Michigan, ***Lucifer*** follows ***Damocles*** in that Morrow Recon Team G-5 awakens 150 years too late (as usual in the game), but does not awaken by accident. They are awakened by Damocles, the US strategic defense computer of that module, for a specific mission. Damocles, searching its records of missile impact sites during the war, has discovered that one missile did not explode, leaving a live nuclear bomb lying unattended somewhere in Wisconsin. Team G-5 is awakened with orders to find and disarm the warhead. Their mission may lead them through several rebuilt towns, into encounters with the current inhabitants of Wisconsin, all the way to a clash with a restrictive religious cult which worships the fallen bomb as its god, Lucifer. To complicate the situation, an advance attack force of the Warriors of Krell is advancing into the area, and the only force standing between them and Lucifer, other than G-5, is a small band of Maxwell's Militia guarding the only standing bridge across the Mississippi with an immobile M-60 tank. The team must find and disarm or destroy the bomb before the Krell reach it. The scenario includes descriptions of the various towns the team is likely to visit, maps of important areas and buildings, plans and contents of the group's Commando V-150, and other pertinent data — such as ***TMP*** weapon stats for Gatling guns, M1 Garand rifles, and the old WWI Springfield, plus detailed hit tables for the V-150.

Operation Lucifer is a well-crafted adventure for ***TMP***, containing a specific mission and enough peripheral material to allow the Project Director to personalize the scenario for a particular group. One nice addition is a list of the exact supplies and equipment to be found in the various ***MP*** caches, here specified for the first time. Another highlight of the scenario is the possibility of encounters with selected members of "Napoleon's Own," a group of lunatics who believe themselves to be famous historical personalities running around without restraint in the post-holocaust world. Among those the group might meet are Davy Crockett, Lady Godiva, Robin Hood, Zorro, Thomas Edison, Long John Silver, Sir John Falstaff, and Calamity Jane (a couple of whom are psionics as well).

Problems in ***Lucifer*** are minor. There is no overall area map provided to aid in mapping the Team's journeys, so the PD will have to obtain a road map of the area for optimum play. The vehicular load sheet included with the V-150 plans is for the turreted version of the Commando vehicle rather than the pintel-mounted machine-gunned model used by G-5. And I'm afraid I find it somewhat hard to believe that *nobody* in the Team knows standard map coordinates as given by Damocles for the bomb's location well enough to locate it easily, or that the maps in their auto-nav computer didn't include such coordinates.

Still, ***Operation Lucifer*** is a competent adventure for ***The Morrow Project*** and should provide PD and players with a challenging — and potentially hazardous — game mission.

—William A. Barton

FROM THE DEEPS OF SPACE (Fantasy Games Unlimited); $5.95. Designed by Stefan Jones. Adventure for ***Villains and Vigilantes***. 25-page book, two pages of bind-in counters. For an indefinite number of players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

FROM THE DEEPS OF SPACE! The aliens from Capella have arrived and invaded the helpless village of Midville! The selfless heroes must save the poor citizens of Midville, face the centauroid, dog-faced Capellans and their vastly superior technology, and thwart the aliens' first military thrust in the conquest of Earth! If they fail, then Earth is doomed! If they succeed, then they must take to space, braving the perils of interstellar travel, to stop the next attempt of the ruthless Capellans before it gets off the ground!

A beautiful adventure. The alien Capellans are displayed in all their nastiness, complete with game stats for their technology and deck plans of their ships. And the space travel is absolutely ridiculous, fitting the comic-book conception perfectly. The bind-in counters continue the tradition of ***V&V*** adventures: head-and-shoulder busts, well-done artwork with direction arrows. Not to mention the vehicle counters for the hover-rafts!

The second part of the adventure is a bit schticky, since the designer intends the heroes to go shooting around the stars, exploring the Capellan empire and seeking out rebellious allies to overthrow the wolfish Capellans. While the first part of the adventure is complete, this "seeking" phase is rather sketchy.

I repeat: a beautiful adventure. It can be translated to any other superhero roleplaying system, too; the plot is that great. With a name like ***From the Deeps of Space***, how can you lose?

—Craig Sheeley

BAD MEDICINE FOR DR. DRUGS (Chaosium); $6. Designed by Ken Rolston, art by Bruce Guice. One 8½" x 11" 52-page book. Adventure for ***Superworld***. For GM and six players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Bad Medicine for Dr. Drugs is Chaosium's first stand-alone adventure for its superhero RPG ***Superworld***. (It includes stats for Hero Games' ***Champions*** superhero system as well.) The adventure concerns the exploits of a group of teenaged superheroes as they put a stop to a drug-dealing ring at their local high school after an old friend has overdosed. This quest will bring them into conflict with the local school bullies, the Monkey Thugs, and several other henchmen and super-villains, all the way up to Dr. Drugs himself. The scenario includes a set of six pregenerated teen superheroes who can be used by players — Brain, Dark Duchess, Flashdance, Overdrive (a handicapped hero who rides a superpowered wheelchair!), Masked Avenger (a Belushi-esque slob who *eats* his way out of trouble), and Quicksilver — plus notes on how to create teenaged heroes, for those who want to generate their own characters. Also provided are stats on the super-villains Dr. Drugs, his martial-artist girlfriend Blossem, his hood father Ogre, and syndicate contact Lorelei. Stats are also provided for the Monkey Thugs, Dr. Drugs' henchmen, and Greaseball, a syndicate operative with a super-grease suit. The adventure includes all the information necessary for the heroes to conduct an investigation of drug use at Warren G. Harding High and track down Dr. Drugs: maps, rumors and clues, notes on the various "in" groups and what they know, plus the students' Unwritten Code (don't squeal). The action can lead from the initial investigation to several ambushes and battles to the kidnapping of the Sophomore Queen before the mellow villain can be brought to bay — with the possible involvement of the Feds, too.

Dr. Drugs is well thought out overall, and is a clever — if somewhat unconventional — idea for a superhero adventure. Several of the pregenerated teen heroes are especially interesting for their powers or disabilities, particularly Overdrive, Masked Avenger, and Flashdance (the latter can only use her Martial Arts and acrobatic powers while listening to music from her Walkman radio). Dr. Drugs is almost a sympathetic villain (maybe a bit too much so), a mellow purveyor of chemical bliss, as he sees himself. Greaseball is appropriately slimy, too. The scenario imparts a real feeling of the teenage high school drug culture, particularly in some of the rumors and clues, which helps establish its "authenticity." As an added bonus, the errata for ***Superworld*** are printed on the inside covers, with two new power descriptions — Immunity and Ultraviolet Vision.

There are a few problems in the scenario, though most are minor. There are some typos, the worst being at least one line dropped from the description of the Rockers clique. And as a ***Superworld*** player/GM, I find the full-page ***Champions*** descriptions of the main heroes and villains somewhat a waste of space (though ***Champions*** players would probably say the same about the ***SW*** stats); it might have been more efficient simply to add the ***Champions*** stats to the ***SW*** pages rather than repeating illustrations and complete descriptions. Also, I wonder how many players will be interested in portraying immature high school heroes — though that might just be my own "advanced" age speaking.

Overall, within its concept, ***Bad Medicine for Dr. Drugs*** is an excellent adventure for ***Superworld*** (or ***Champions***), though those of us long out of high school may have to work a bit harder to bring it off. With that qualification, I recommend it.

—William A. Barton

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WORLD OF VOG MUR (Iron Crown Enterprises); $6. Designed by Peter C. Fenlon and John Ruemmler. Supplement to ***Rolemaster***. One 8½" x 11" 34-page book. For referee and indefinite number of players (four is best); playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

World of Vog Mur is a milieu or campaign setting for the ***Rolemaster*** system. *Vog Mur* ("death watch") consists of three small islands, only the largest of which, *Dalov Perll* ("island of wind"), is inhabited by humans. *Dalov Perll* is ruled by five half-elven brothers, and the eldest has complete control over the island and its 300 human inhabitants. There are five adventure situations on *Dalov Perll* of different complexities. *Ordye Throg* ("sky keep") is the second largest island, over which towers the ancient extinct volcano of *Buir Dom* ("silver fires"), which contains a mysterious lake. The tiniest isle, *Dalla Veurd* ("islet of passing"), is heavily forested, and conceals the ancient shrine of *Lon Lemira*, as well as *Gudd Tyl* ("ale hall"). GMs and players who are used to hundred-mile hikes and Chicago-sized cities will be surprised by the tiny scale of ***Vog Mur***, since the entire campaign could fit within a 10-mile wide circle. *Dalov Perll*, the largest island, is six miles long, while the largest city contains 300 inhabitants.

Vog Mur is notable for its realism. After reading the module, I felt I actually knew the islets. This is due to the emphasis on abstract details that may not ever enter directly into play, but act upon the referee's mind. These details include such trivia as the flora and fauna of *Vog Mur*, its political structures, and the colorfully-written history of the islands, instead of the monsters, combat statistics, and floor plans most modules emphasize. ***Vog Mur*** provides facts that few GMs would deem important enough for inclusion in a setting, but which add immensely to the color of the module. Even a dictionary of commonly used words is included, for construction of new place names (e.g., *Burn Wode* or "Black Hill").

Unfortunately, the module reads like an encyclopedia article, with long and boring passages about subjects like *Vog Mur*'s ecology. Also, the module offers little for statistics-lovers, and a few unanswered questions and blank areas remain, such as how much of this tremendous quantity of information the players actually know.

World of Vog Mur will keep a group occupied for months of real time. Even if used only to add a little color to a campaign, it is definitely worth its $6 price.

—Jeff Ong

THE DRAGON LORD (Fantasy Games Unlimited); $6. Designed by J. Andrew Keith. Adventure for ***Chivalry and Sorcery***. 20-page book. For an indefinite number of players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

The Dragon Lord is an adventure for beginning ***C&S*** characters. A terrible dragon has appeared out of the wilds to ravage the town of Barrisglen. It destroyed the local nobility, routed the feudal forces, and continues to terrorize the area; and now the marauding lizard has kidnaped the visiting princess and wounded her uncle! Her uncle, the Duke, promises great wealth and power to those who return the Princess alive. If that's not motivation enough, nothing is! A mysterious wizardly ally, a dragons-bane sword, a heat-resistant shield, and a powerful amulet also feature highly in this classic story of magic and fire-breathing. Complete background, maps, and mandated encounters are provided for the gamemaster, along with tables for random encounter probability.

The Dragon Lord is tricky; its ancient story line will lull players into dangerous avenues of thought, even though plenty of clues to the real situation are provided. Old plot or not, the story is rich and varied, reading a little like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham* (and a bit like the movie *Dragonslayer*). J.A. Keith does an excellent job of storytelling.

Unfortunately, so much detail is given to the story that little is given to the NPCs; of them all, the dragon is the only one really dealt with. And the encounter tables! All the GM is given is a set of probabilities, with vague hints as to what the encounter should be if the dice says there should be one. The gamemaster's maps, although four-color, are rather shoddy paintings, with practically no detail.

The Dragon Lord has all the earmarks of an adventure run by the author that someone decided to market, using the original jury-rigged materials from the game session! It's not worth six dollars, being a fairly simple adventure that most any gamemaster could make up. I expected better from FGU.

—Craig Sheeley

ULTRAFORCE (AutoVentures); $7. Designed by Aaron Allston. An auto-combat adventure supplement. 32-page booklet and 11" x 24½" dust jacket. For two or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Ultraforce is the third (and rumored to be the last) in a series of auto-combat adventure modules designed for use with ***Car Wars***, ***Battlecars***, and ***Highway 2000***. In this one, players are members of the elite strikeforce known as "Ultraforce" (any similarity between this group and another, named "Megaforce," is strictly coincidental). Included are tables of organization, new vehicles and equipment, two scenarios, and a complete version of the Quick Combat System that Aaron Allston introduced in ***Hell on Wheels***.

As with the previous AutoVenture releases, ***Ultraforce*** shows a lot of imagination and attention

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to detail. Not only are the vehicles and equipment reusable, but they stand up to repeated play, long after the adventures in the module have been retired. The ***Battlecars*** cards and rules for aerial movement open whole new vistas for auto-combat gaming that previously went ignored.

If ***Ultraforce*** has any faults, they border on the insignificant: the maps could have been gridded in increments for easy transposition to the playing map; the non-player characters who head Ultraforce could have been given game stats; there are other equally minor quibbles.

I found ***Ultraforce*** to be the most useful and interesting of the AutoVentures modules (and also the deadliest). If you want to put some new thunder in your auto-combats or overhaul your campaign, ***Ultraforce*** will provide all the motorvation you need. At last, we closet-duellists can put our skills to a real test, for a real cause! And remember . . . the good guys always win.

—Jerry Epperson

MURDERWORLD! (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Jeff Grubb. Module for ***Marvel Super Heroes***. One 16-page 8½" x 11" module with 17" x 22" two-sided map of the Baxter Building and (part of) Murderworld; wraparound cover with stats of Fantastic Four and some of their associates. For two or more players (ideally five); playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

The Fantastic Four have their hands full when Arcade invites them to visit ***Murderworld!*** And if they survive to return home, what new menace awaits them at the Baxter Building . . .? This adventure takes place after *The Secret Wars* — She-Hulk is a member of the FF, and the Thing can change back to Ben Grimm at will; with minor modifications it could be placed at another point in their history (although no stats are given for Medusa or any other past members of the FF except the Thing).

One reason to buy ***Marvel Super Heroes*** is to play the "What if . . .?" game. There's an element of this here — what if the FF were taken to Murderworld, site of two ***X-Men*** adventures and one *Spider-Man* team-up? It sets up a deathtrap for each of the heroes, complete with suggestions on how they can get out and what will happen when they do (and just in case they don't, there is the inevitable *deus ex machina*). And the adventure isn't over when the heroes leave Murderworld. Enough background is included to enable a group to start its own FF campaign, including stats for the late lamented Dr. Doom (if he's really dead . . .).

Unfortunately, this module is not without flaws. The players have to react in certain ways at certain points or the entire adventure is ruined. The labelling on the map of Murderworld gives away too much. No pieces are included for She-Hulk, Arcade, or any of the other new characters. Despite the mention that extra heroes could be added if there are more than five players, no suggestions are made about what Arcade will do with them while the FF are battling their deathtraps. And, despite its name, the main thrust of this adventure isn't Murderworld at all. People more interested in the Murderworld concept than in the FF will be disappointed. They should have called it ***The Invasion(s) of the Baxter Building!*** or something.

As a side note, the traps were obviously designed with the FF in mind; substituting four Avengers or four X-Men will not work as well. This is a flaw that is practically unique to ***Marvel Super Heroes*** — the modules so far cannot be used with characters other than those included unless the GM does some work. In conclusion, this module would make a good starting point for a Fantastic Four campaign; otherwise it is not worth it. 'Nuff said. (I always wanted to say that.)

—Rambling Russell Collins, Rugged Reviewer

QUAGMIRE (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Merle Rasmussen. Adventure module for ***Dungeons & Dragons***. One three-panel 25" x 11" map, 32-page rulebook. Playing time and number of players indefinite. Published 1984.

Just when you thought adventure modules had exhausted every conceivable variation on dungeon design, along comes ***Quagmire*** with its 13-level cities in the shape of gigantic spiral seashells. The adventurers stumble upon a message in a bottle sent by the king of Quagmire (one of the seashell cities), desperately requesting their help in overcoming the oppressive lizard men who hold them captive.

Quagmire is perfect for DMs who balk at the thought of having to absorb pages of background information before they can run an adventure. Since

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This review format is designed to encourage fairness and to give the reader enough information to let him or her decide whether he or she wants to buy that game. Keep that in mind when you write. This is a short review, *not* a complete analysis.

Featured Reviews

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all of the preliminary information is contained in a few paragraphs and the plot itself is very simple, a DM could conceivably have his adventurers on the road within a few minutes of his first reading. Most of the module concerns the journey to the spiral cities, a trip that may involve travel across deserts, swamps, and the open sea. Designer Merle Rasmussen has provided dozens of encounters to spice up the journey, neatly addressing a fundamental problem of many wilderness adventures: how to keep the party occupied while they travel long distances. Though it sounds gimmicky, the spiral cities setting is also a nice change of pace from the usual underground dungeons and haunted houses.

Quagmire suffers from one of the most common failings of roleplaying modules, the anti-climactic ending. After hours or days of working through an adventure, players have the right to expect a big finish to make all their trials and tribulations worthwhile. Though the architecture is interesting, there's not much going on in the spiral cities, and rescuing the good guys involves little more than beating up the bad guys. The encounters along the way are generally good ones, but they're also totally unrelated to the purpose of the mission.

Quagmire isn't particularly engaging for either players or DM. The flimsy story line that makes it easy to run also makes it ultimately a drag to play. It should be noted, however, that the extensive wilderness section has a lot of useful ideas and imaginative encounters that could easily be used elsewhere. ***Quagmire*** makes a good supplement, but as a self-contained adventure, it's not much.

—Rick Swan

ORION RUSE (FASA); $7. Designed by Patrick Larkin. Adventure for ***Star Trek: The Role-Playing Game***. 48-page book. For two to nine players; playing time three to six hours. Published 1984.

Orion Ruse takes the players to the planet of Daros IV, an Orion trade world dominated by trading clans, in search of a lucrative contract with a wealthy trading family and sizable profit from the sale of goods. However, family rivalries, the shifting political and economic situation, and a crew of rival merchants promise to add some interest to a "milk run." Now comes the tricky part: A portion of the crew of the good merchant *Eridani Star* are in reality Star Fleet agents, smuggled onto Daros IV for the purpose of finding out what happened to their resident agent on-planet, who seems to have disappeared after reporting rumors of a Klingon-Orion pirate gang operating out of Daros IV! The two groups, merchant and Fleet, have to puzzle through Orion customs and mores in pursuit of their various goals, prowling for information (and wealth) in the marketplaces and palaces, trying to fool the local populace into thinking that the Star Fleet operatives are really merchants (not an easy task), and generally creating trouble for each other as each group runs into forces bent on denying them success. The gamemaster is assisted in portraying this by five well-done building compound maps, complete information on the various NPCs, and an *almost* sequentially ordered text.

Orion Ruse is a very good adventure for the ***ST: RPG*** system: The players must rely on their communication and leadership skills for the most part, not on ship abilities and massive firepower. On Daros IV the bad guys are more than likely to outgun the players, and acting before thinking is likely to get the party trashed. Furthermore, the players have to *think*; no knee-jerk roleplaying here! If they miss the clues, they could wind up flubbing not one but both missions (though they probably won't care if they messed up that badly: They'll be dead). ***Orion Ruse*** is very involved, and the gamemaster is given the feel of this through quite complete descriptions of the surroundings and people.

On the other hand, the complexity of the adventure may be too much for some to handle. Not only do you have to keep the players guessing, but you have to handle *two* teams of them — often separately, since their aims are so different (the merchants just want to close the deal, grab a cargo, and leave, while the Star Fleet people are duty-bound to find out what's going on on Daros IV). While the adventure could be played with only merchants or only Star Fleet, it doesn't work nearly as well; you really *need* two different groups (numbering no more than nine; that's the maximum number of people the ship will hold).

If you like split-team adventures, if you want to get out of the starship combat/space adventure rut, if you really like to confuse and bamboozle your players, or if you'd like to get a playing group of Star Fleet personnel together with a playing group of merchants, then buy ***Orion Ruse***. The price is high, of course, but that's what you expect from a Paramount-licensed product.

—Craig Sheeley

TIME TRAP (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Bruce Nesmith. Adventure for ***Marvel Super Heroes***. 16-page booklet, 16" x 20" two-sided map, binder cover with character outlines. For two to six players; playing time three to six hours. Published 1984.

Face front, true believers! Kang the Conqueror, and his later incarnation, Immortus, are taking the Avengers on a trip through time to save the Earth from mass nuclear meltdown. The Avengers must journey into the past to prevent events leading up to the critical overload from happening, thereby preventing the overload from happening. They must battle the Mimic, the alien Skrulls, Drax the Destroyer, and even the awesome Grey Gargoyle before proceeding to the Omega Dimension to gain the only weapon which will defeat Kang and his time-dabbling. Sound simple? It isn't: The foes are

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extremely tough (the Grey Gargoyle alone is a match for all six of the Avengers), the goals are difficult, and no matter how you try, the meddlings of Kang always seem to get worse! Can the world be saved?

Time Trap will be welcomed by Avengers fans. The game stats and profiles of the current Avengers (Captains America and Marvel, Starfox, the Wasp, the Scarlet Witch, and their leader, the Vision) are valuable to those who didn't buy the TSR release ***Avengers Assembled***. The large map is a real prize, too, adding a wilderness battleground to the game, as well as maps of the fortress in the Omega Dimension and the fabled Avengers' mansion! Most of all, gamemasters with players who are continually altering adventures through unforeseen actions will like ***Time Trap:*** It is so thoroughly laid out that there is practically nothing players can do to disrupt the adventure flow.

However, this iron control is the biggest problem in ***Time Trap***. As in an earlier ***MSH*** release, ***Breeder Bombs***, the players are led around by their noses. In ***Time Trap***, they are teleported through time from place to place by the gamemaster, with no choice in the matter. The only thing the players can do is fight! A far cry from the adventure included in the ***Marvel Super Heroes*** game, where the heroes did a little detective work. I have yet to see a ***MSH*** adventure where the heroes get to do some *thinking*; TSR seems to have a problem with this. Another problem, in view of the section in the game on creating your own heroes, is that ***Time Trap*** (and ***Breeder Bombs***) will not work well with any group but the Avengers; it is set up for the Avengers, to the exclusion of other possibilities (the X-Men from ***Breeder Bombs*** could not be substituted for the Avengers in ***Time Trap***, nor would the Avengers work at all in ***Breeder Bombs***). I doubt that even a different mix of Avengers would work well.

If the Avengers are among your favorite groups; if you want a scenario with lots of combat that doesn't require much thought, where nothing can go wrong, no matter what; if, after you think about the problems, you still like an evening of beer-and-pretzels gaming, then ***Time Trap*** is a good buy. After all, it is quite reasonably priced.

—Craig Sheeley

LONDON BY NIGHT (Ragnarok); $4.95 (bagged)/$5.95 (boxed). Designed by David Nalle and Eric Olson. Expansion set for ***To Challenge Tomorrow***. One 7" x 8½" 20-page scenario book, one 7" x 8½" 12-page guidebook, four 8½" x 11" map sections. Published 1984.

Subtitled "Adventure in a Victorian City," ***London by Night*** is the second expansion set for Ragnarok Enterprises' ***To Challenge Tomorrow*** generic RPG, the first with an historical/occult theme. As is obvious from the title, ***London by Night*** offers historical and geographic data, rules alterations, and scenarios for roleplaying ***TCT*** in London during the 1890s — the times of Sherlock Holmes and Dracula, among others. The scenario book provides introductory notes and essays on life in Victorian London, including the social life of the times, typical careers and occupations (an aid in generating Victorian ***TCT*** characters), government and political factions, law and crime, and the supernatural. There is also a section on skill adjustments for character generation, and a list of literary sources for use by GMs in devising scenarios in Victorian London. Four scenarios are presented, two occult and two straight investigation — one involves characters with Egyptian mythology, the other encounters with Sherlock Holmes and Dracula. The guide book and map are reprinted from an 1890s edition of *Baedeker's Guide to London* — among the best available from the period.

London by Night features a great deal of data on Victorian London that would be of use to GMs of any game system who wish to run campaigns in that era — ***Call of Cthulhu*** and ***Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes*** come readily to mind (plus any of the new time-travel RPGs as well). The *Baedeker* reprints are especially useful, as they offer more information than can be easily found in most contemporary sources. The scenarios are well-conceived, too, if a bit sketchy. The occult ones were most interesting to me, with references to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the New Hellfire Club, but the investigative ones are intriguing as well — especially one involving stolen plans for the Maxim machine gun, German spies, roving gypsies, and the Tower of London.

The only real problems with ***London by Night*** are production-related: Most of the maps are difficult to read, and the reproduced type of the *Baedeker* is so tiny that in places a magnifying glass might be necessary. A minor "historical" flub has Holmes in practice during the years he was missing after his "death" at the Reichenbach Falls, at least according to the original stories.

In spite of its production problems, ***London by Night*** is an excellent, informative play-aid. Even a Victorian London buff such as myself was able to find a few bits of "new" data. I recommend it to any gamer interested in the era.

—William A. Barton

RAVENLOFT (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Tracy and Laura Hickman. Adventure module for ***Dungeons & Dragons***. One 11" x 17" double-sided map, one single-sided 11" x 17" map, one 32-page rulebook. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

You want atmosphere? There's so much gothic atmosphere in ***Ravenloft*** that if it had any more, it'd flap its pages and fly away. There's not a corridor without a cobweb or a belfry without a bat in Castle Ravenloft, the home of Strahd Von Zarovich (who bears more than a passing resemblance to a certain Count from Transylvania). The players' mission is to thwart the plans of Strahd and free the lands of Barovia from his evil domination.

With its horror film overtones, ***Ravenloft*** provides a definite change of pace from most TSR ***Dungeons & Dragons*** modules. No sooner do the adventurers walk through the gates of Barovia than a fog rolls in and bodies begin to turn up in the bushes. There are gypsies and witches, werewolves and ghosts — in fact, if you've seen it in a monster movie, it'll probably pop up in ***Ravenloft***. A highlight of the adventure is the exploration of the underground catacombs containing 40 — count 'em — 40 separate crypts; examining their contents provides a lot of ghoulish fun.

There are a few problems, though. The bulk of the adventure involves a search of the Castle Ravenloft, and it's not too interesting. Although the descriptions are very vivid (and creepy), the castle is essentially deserted and encounters are few and far between. The actual location of Strahd and his artifacts (as well as Strahd's current goal) is determined at the beginning of the game by drawing from a regular deck of playing cards and referring to a table. The process is supposed to simulate a gypsy fortune teller, but the effect is silly and the results are too arbitrary. More seriously, if Strahd is played exactly as indicated, he is virtually invulnerable. Players are going to have to be incredibly lucky or receive some extra help from the DM to defeat him.

Ravenloft is such a refreshing change that even with its problems, it's recommended. Filling up the castle with a few more encounters and making Strahd a little less dangerous will round off most of the rough edges. (And for players whose gothic appetites are whetted by ***Ravenloft***, be sure to check out ***Call of Cthulhu*** for a taste of the real thing!)

—Rick Swan

PUBLICATIONS

THE ARMORY, VOL. 1 (2nd edition) (Firebird, Ltd.); $12.95. Designed by Kevin Dockery. One 8½" x 11" 174-page book. Published 1984.

One complaint a lot of gamers have about some modern RPGs is that they don't include a great enough variety of weapons. After all, there *are* SMGs other than Thompsons, Uzis, or Ingrams, and assault rifles other than M-16s or AK-47s. Some games do provide guidelines for adapting weapons not included to the game system, but to do so one needs hard data on the gun. Enter Kevin Dockery, one of the original designers of the popular *Morrow Project* RPG, and *The Armory, Vol. 1* — a compendium of various gunpower weapons from the 14th-century Tannenburg hand cannon to the modern bullpup-configured caseless assault rifles. Each weapon is described in terms of its type, date adopted, caliber, length, muzzle velocity, weights, ranges, type and rate of firing, feed devices, basic load, and load weight. A photo or drawing of the weapon and additional descriptive notes round out each presentation. Various sections cover pistols, submachine guns, rifles, machine guns, miscellaneous weapons (shotguns, flamethrowers, grenade launchers), heavy weapons (mortars, recoilless rifles, 20 mm cannon), grenades, and alternate types of small arms ammunition. *Twenty-five* appendices give additional information and also provide gaming data for these weapons for use with Hero Games' ***Espionage*** and Blade's ***Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes***.

The weapons data found in ***The Armory, Vol. 1*** is invaluable to gamers and GMs alike for converting a wide variety of small and heavy arms into

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other favorite gaming system. Game designers, too, now have a handy reference source for weapons conversions into their new systems. The second edition's inclusion of ***Espionage*** and ***MSPE*** stats makes the book of special interest to players of those systems. The second edition *Armory* is a more attractive volume, too, with a cover depicting full-color examples of some of the weapons inside and sharper interior photos as well.

What problems I have with this book are minor and mostly due to a few omissions of weapons I'd like to have seen included. For example, while the Gatling machine gun is included, the Nordenfeldt and other early types aren't. Neither is the original Maxim machine gun, though the 1908 German variation and the British Vickers are. Oddities such as the LeMat pistol/shotgun combo are overlooked as well. But perhaps these will appear in promised future volumes.

In spite of omissions such as these, *The Armory Vol. 1* (second edition) is the best weapons reference book of its type I've seen yet. I recommend it to all gamers who care about the difference between various weapons and how they function in play.

—William A. Barton

TnT (Ken St. Andre); $1 per issue; 10-page fanzine. Published monthly. Each issue contains variants, a solo adventure, and various departments.

TnT is a ***Tunnels & Trolls*** fanzine published and edited by Ken St. Andre, the game's designer. It is printed on high-quality xerox on loose 8½" x 11" sheets and appears about once per month.

TnT contains several departments; perhaps the most popular is "The Infinite Adventure," a continuing solo adventure that appears every issue. Each issue two or more pages of paragraphs are added. Another popular section is "The Mythical 6th Edition," rule variants and alternate views of the system. Also included are letters, short fiction, breathtaking art, and Ken's own story of how the game got started. (*TnT*'s material usually comes from reader contributions. All you aspiring writers out there may get your start here!)

Someone expecting to find information about something other than ***Tunnels & Trolls*** here will be greatly disappointed. The zine consists *only* of ***T&T*** (except for the short fiction). The only flaw is the size of it — ten pages is somewhat skimpy. But printing and mailing costs can be overwhelming, so I can see Ken's point.

If you play ***T&T***, I highly recommend you shell out $1 a month to get *TnT*. Ken will accept cash, checks, or stamps. Mail to: Ken St. Andre; 3421 E. Yale; Phoenix, AZ 85008.

—Russell Heller

COMPUTER GAMES

LEGACY OF LLYLGAMYN (Sir-Tech Software Inc., 6 Main Street, Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669); $39.95. Designed by *W.A.R.G.* (Wizardry Adventurer's Research Group). Third scenario of *Wizardry* series. Requires ***Wizardry*** ("Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord") for play. Disk for 48K Apple II, IBM PC; playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

Legacy of Llylgamyn takes place a generation after the time of the first ***Wizardry*** scenarios. Freak earthquakes, tidal waves, and sudden changes in weather affect the world. Your characters' mission is to bring nature back under control. Characters in this game are the descendants of previous characters. Old characters bequeath their descendants names, titles, stats, and honors, but not level or alignment. The descendants start out at first level, and their ancestors are safe in history. Your new characters' task is to find the great dragon L'kreth and obtain a magic orb that can control the problems besieging Llylgamyn.

The story adds new features to the game. You will need groups of both alignments to win. Some levels and items are inaccessible by groups of one alignment, while accessible by others. Multiple commands can now be entered, speeding combat and movement. The typeahead buffer is cleared every time battle is entered or text is displayed. The major improvement over the first two games is the new system of graphics. Instead of information being displayed in tiny windows on the screen, boxes overlay others in a Lisa-like fashion. The maze now covers the entire screen, not just a small corner. Although the monsters are still as small as before, they appear in the middle of the screen, instead of off to the side.

Legacy of Llylgamyn does have its problems. Some of the advantageous bugs are gone, but many detrimental ones replaced them. The character set is Sir-Tech defined, but the letters are thick and not very legible. The speed of play is hampered by the game's internals, which are needed for the new graphics and character set. The sound still cannot be disabled except by unplugging the speaker. The game is back in a box, but the instructions only give the changes in commands.

Wizardry III: Legacy of Llylgamyn is the best scenario of the series yet. It has a solid story, with riddles appropriate to the scenario. This game is recommended for those who have the original, but characters with solid stats from the first two games are required.

—Philip L. Wing

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Unicorn Gold Mystery Still Unsolved

$10,000 is on the line now that the deadline for solving the mystery of Metagaming's *Treasure of Unicorn Gold* adventure has passed — but neither the money nor the solution to the puzzle seems to be forthcoming.

The story begins in 1981 when, on the heels of the successful *Treasure of the Silver Dragon* scenario, Metagaming published *Treasure of Unicorn Gold*. In addition to being a complete fantasy scenario for *The Fantasy Trip*, *Unicorn Gold* contained maps and clues to a buried statue (a golden unicorn, naturally). The person who found the statue, the game promised, would also receive a $10,000 cash prize from Metagaming.

The contest rules in *Unicorn Gold* went on to say that if the statue had not been found by September 1, 1984, Metagaming would recover the statue, announce where it had been hidden, and hold a drawing among all players who had sent in a registration postcard that was included in the game — the lucky winner to receive the $10,000.

Then came 1983, and the demise of Metagaming. Company president Howard Thompson announced then that the company was going out of business "voluntarily," due to a lack of interest in continuing to work in the game business. Thompson announced that even though Metagaming was going out of business, the *Unicorn Gold* contest was still on and the prize would still be awarded.

The September deadline has come and gone. Despite repeated efforts by a number of interested *Unicorn Gold* players to find the solution to the mystery, Thompson has refused to give out any information or answer any questions. When contacted by *Space Gamer* magazine about the *Unicorn Gold* question, Thompson said he had no comment to make. When asked if that meant the prize would not be awarded, he said, "I have nothing to say on that," and ended the conversation.

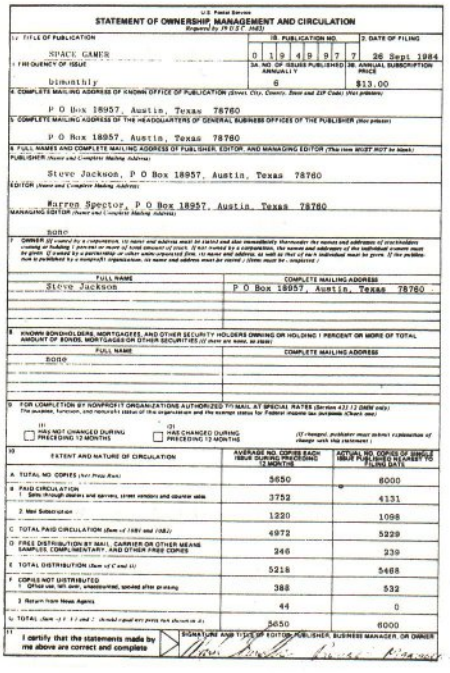
There is a small but dedicated network of *Unicorn Gold* players very interested in discovering the answer to the mystery. Several have made more than one trip to the site where they believe the statue to be buried, near Harrison Bay State Park just east of Chattanooga, Tennessee. So far, the players have been unable to narrow it down any further, which has lead to some grumbling and charges that the clues are not precise enough to solve the mystery. Some people have gone so far as to charge that the statue was never really buried — but there is not enough information either to confirm or deny that, and Thompson isn't talking.

Air Force Sets Up OGRE Tournament

The US Air Force is organizing a major *Ogre/G.E.V.* tournament for this February in conjunction with Project Warrior, a program to get servicemen and women interested in things military. "This is an experimental tournament, the first of its kind in military history," said Airman First Class Robert Vincent. Vincent is organizing the tournament under the direction of Captain Milton McWilliams. Both are stationed at Dyess Air Force Base in El Paso, Texas.

The tournament will be a single-elimination event involving four-person teams from up to 35 Air Force bases across the South, as well as cadet teams from Texas A&M University and the US Air Force Academy. The event will take place at Warcon '85, Feb. 8-10, 1985, on the campus of Texas A&M University in College Station, TX. Each base and cadet group will have its own tournament to pick a four-person team to go on to the finals. Each team will have to pay its own way to College Station, but Vincent said that if the tournament is a success, trips to future tourneys will be paid for by the government. Vincent also said that if the Pentagon-approved project takes off, it will expand to include not only all the Air Force bases in the continental US, but also teams from other branches of the service.

Vincent said the idea for the tournament came from Lou Zocchi, a former Air Force serviceman. Zocchi owns and operates Gamescience, a Mississippi-based game manufacturer and distributor. *Ogre/G.E.V.* was chosen, Vincent said, because "it's a futuristic game and very simplistic, but it's also very tactical." Vincent said that the players at this year's tournament would choose which game to use for next year's Project Warrior competition. He mentioned ***Panzerblitz*** and ***Panzer Leader*** as possibilities, but also left open the chance that next year's Project Warrior tournament would be an *Ogre/G.E.V.* rematch.



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Convention Calendar

Orono, Maine — EXPLORERCON MAINE 1985, Feb. 2. Small gaming con put on by Explorer Post 315. Contact Dan Belyea, 474 Stillwater Ave., Old Town, ME 04468.

***College Station, TX** — WARCON '85, Feb. 8-10. Gaming con on the campus of Texas A&M University. Contact Warcon '85, MSC Nova, TAMU, Box J-1, College Station, TX 77844.

Lincoln, NE — MINI LIN-CON '85, Feb. 9-10. Gaming con sponsored by Hobby Town game store. Contact Hobby Town, 130 North 13th St., Lincoln, NE 68508.

Houston, TX — CONTEX II, Feb. 15-17. SF con featuring Marion Zimmer Bradley. Contact Friends of Fandom, P.O. Box 772473, Houston, TX 77215.

Oakland, CA — DUNDRACON IX, Feb. 15-18. Gaming con. Contact DunDraCon, 386 Alcatraz Ave., Oakland, CA 94618.

***Pasadena, CA** — ORCCON 1985, Feb. 16-18. Gaming con. Contact Strategicon, Box 2577, Anaheim, CA 92804.

Manhattan, KS — IMAGICON 4, March 1-3. Gaming con on the campus of Kansas State University. Contact StarRiders, c/o Union Activities Center, K-State Union, KSU, Manhattan, KS 66506.

Dallas, TX — FANCON '85, March 8-10. SF and art con featuring George Takei, Majel Barrett Roddenberry, and lots of others. Contact Fancon '85, PO Box 380297, Duncanville, TX 75138.

Biloxi, MS — COASTCON VIII, March 8-10. Sf and gaming con featuring Alan Dean Foster. Contact CoastCon, Box 1423, Biloxi, MS 39533.

Raleigh, NC — TRI-CON III, March 15-17. Gaming/SF con on the North Carolina State University campus. Contact Tri-Con III, Box 50201, Raleigh, NC 27650.

*SJ Games will attend the cons marked with an asterisk.

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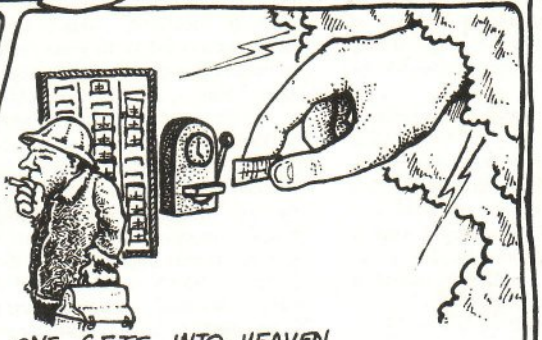


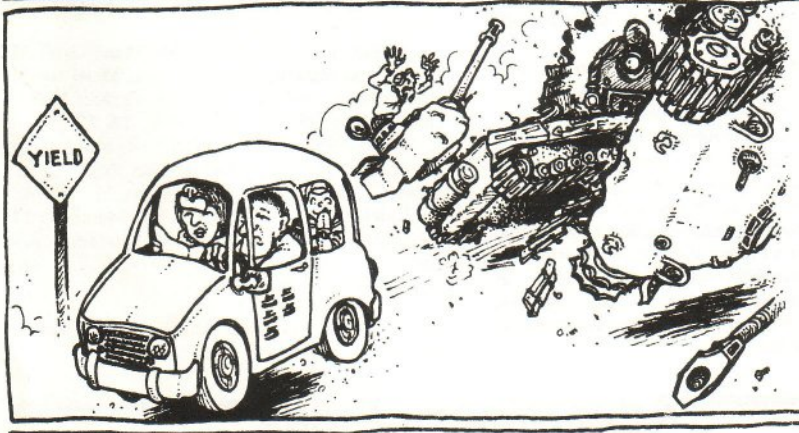
NO ONE GETS INTO HEAVEN UNTIL I GET A RAISE!....

In SUPER SQUADRON (Adventure Simulations), a superhero who gets the occupation "God" then rolls for "Average Pay."

THEY DON'T MAKE PEDESTRIANS LIKE THEY USED TO....

In Steve Jackson Games' CAR WARS, two pedestrians who run into each other at full tilt stand an even chance of dying from the impact...

(—Jim Gould)



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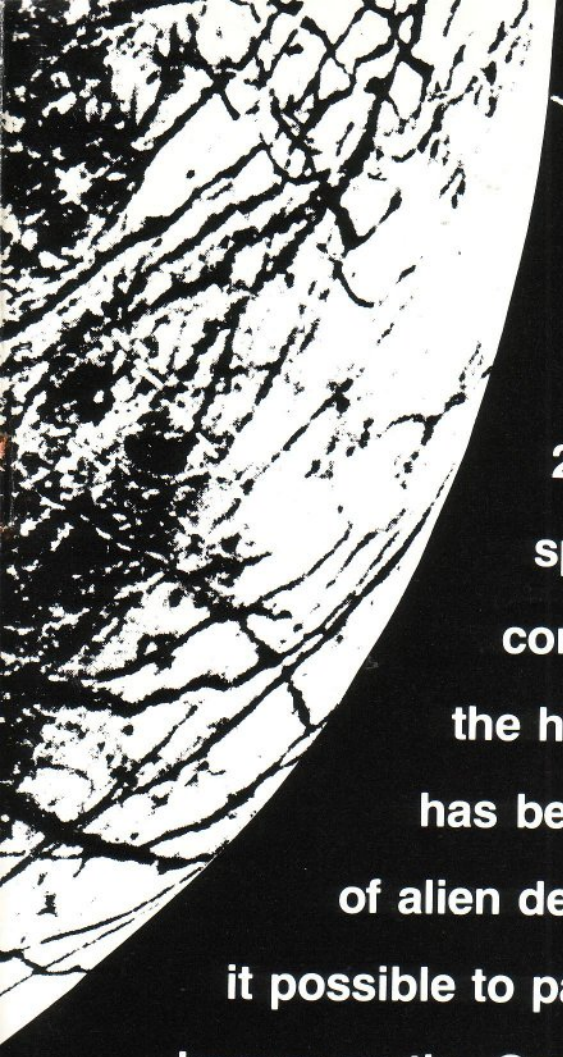
In AD&D (TSR), the average 13th-level fighter can survive a fall from <u>any</u> height.

(—Jim Gould)



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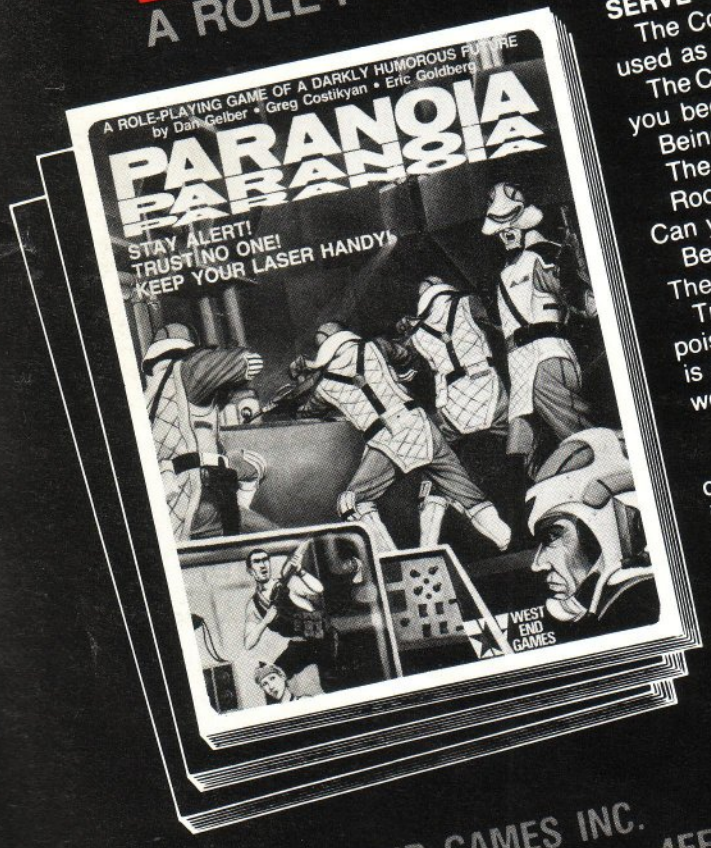
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